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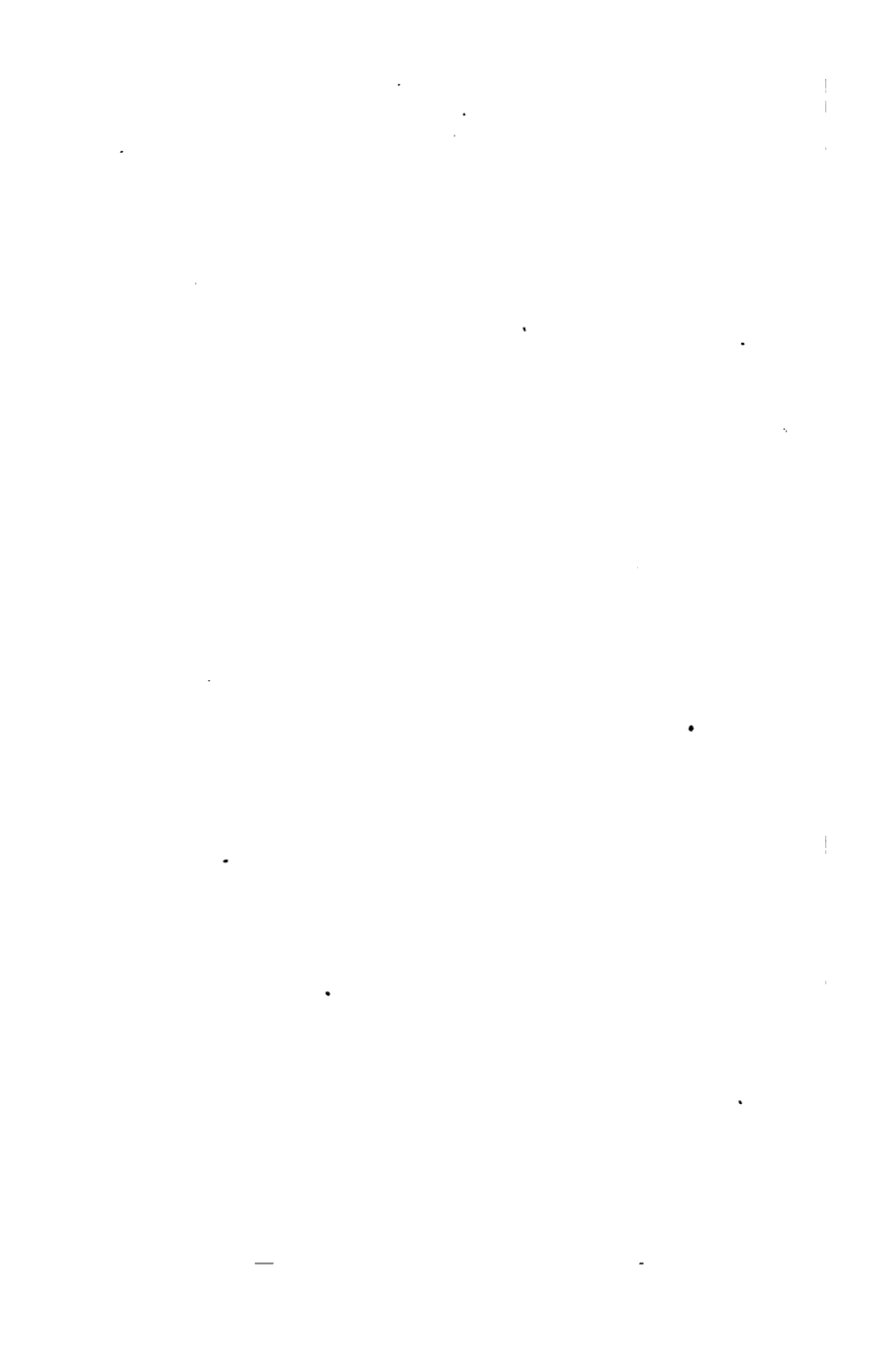


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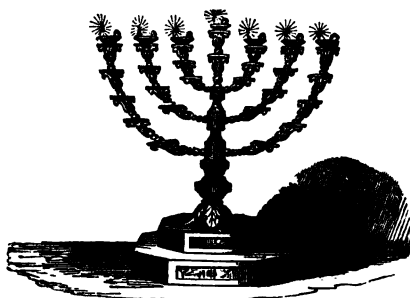
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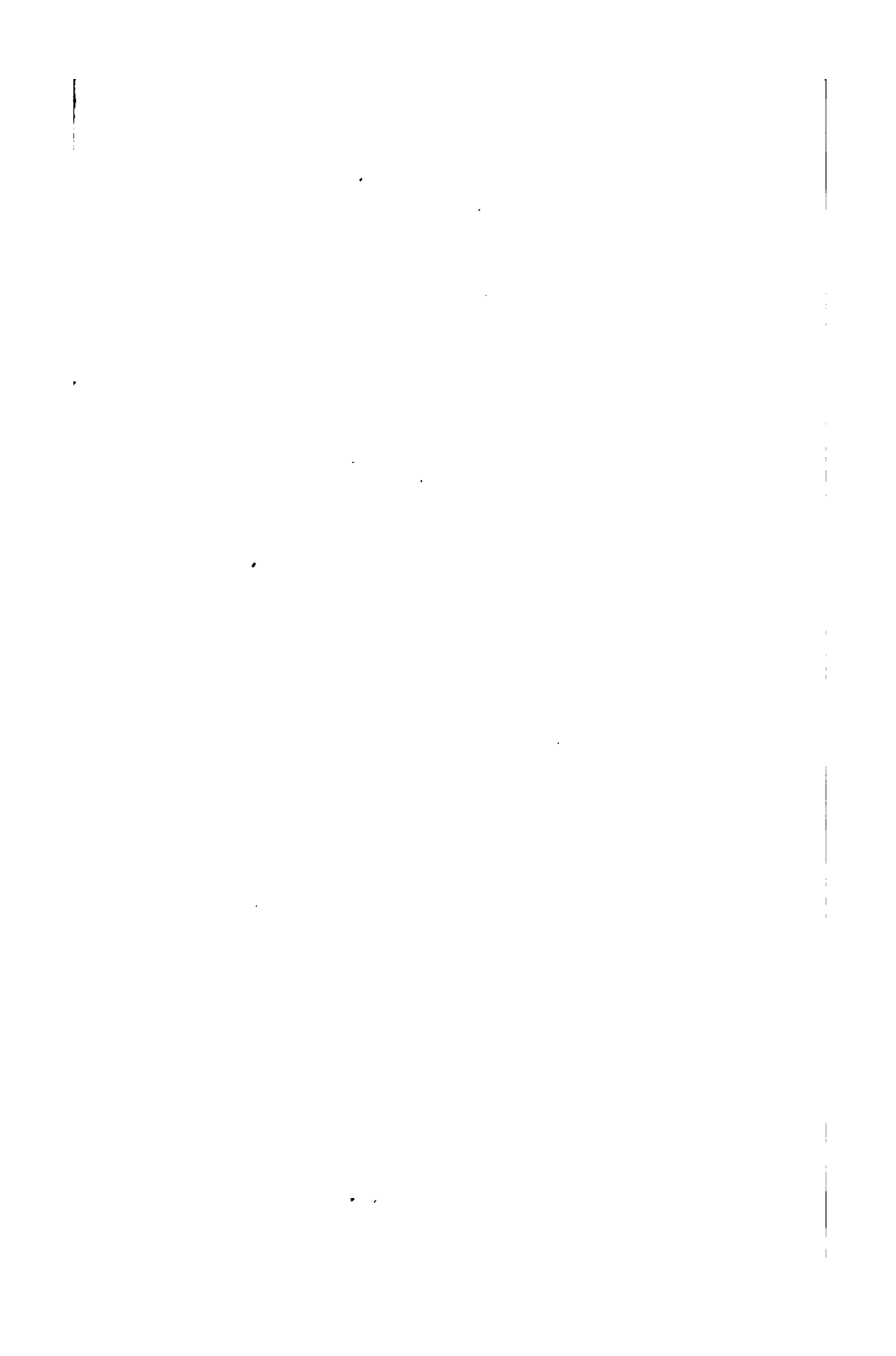
THE
SEVEN CHURCHES
OF
A S I A.

BY THE
REV. J. A. WALLACE,
MINISTER OF HAWICK.



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THE SEVEN CHURCHES OF ASIA.

CHAPTER I.

PRELIMINARY REMARKS.

To an intelligent reader of the Bible it must be evident, that the term Asia, as applied to the Seven Churches, does not comprehend the whole of that extensive territory which now bears the same designation; but is limited to Pro-consular Asia, a district of inconsiderable extent, which included Lydia, Caria, Mysia, and Ionia, and within whose limits were situated, and at no great distance from each other, the whole of the churches to whom the Apocalyptic messages were addressed. We are not, however, to suppose that there were only seven Christian communities at that time in existence, for the gospel had been preached over the whole extent of the Roman empire, and multitudes of churches had been formed in different and in distant parts of the world. But the seven which are specified in the book of Revelations, were singled out from the rest, probably, in the first instance, because the apostle John was peculiarly interested in their well-being, being intimately acquainted with their circumstances, and some, if not all of them, having enjoyed more or less the benefit

of his personal ministrations. The number, too, was restricted to seven, we presume for this reason, that they might bear a resemblance to the golden Candlestick of the Tabernacle, to which we shall have occasion again to advert, and which, with its seven lamps, may be regarded as emblematic of the Church Universal,—a Church which is divided into a variety of branches, from some of which the true light may be shining with greater brilliancy than from others ; but which are all connected with one shaft, all resting on one foundation, all one in Christ. And as seven is sometimes employed as a mystic number expressive of perfection or completeness, so the Seven Churches of Asia, though in themselves comprehending but a small part of the Church of Christ, may yet be considered as standing for the whole, and that with the greatest propriety ; for we can scarcely conceive of any situation in which any branch of the Church of Christ can be placed, or of any persecution to which it is likely to be exposed, or of any sin into which it is in danger of being betrayed, or of any duty which it is under obligation to perform, in regard to which there is not something analogous in the case of the Seven Churches of Asia ; and, therefore it may be presumed, that the messages which were specially addressed unto them in the first instance, whether in the language of encouragement, or of warning, were designed also for the instruction or the benefit of every other branch of the Church of Christ in all ages of the world, even to the end of time.

In illustration of this point we notice, first of all, that in every one of the messages to the Churches of Asia, there

is embodied, in precisely the same words, the solemn and emphatic admonition :—"He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches." Such being the case, it was, of course, the duty of every church, and of all the individuals of whom it was composed, not only to listen with special attention to the message addressed to themselves, and which, because of its adaptation to the precise position which they held at the time, was fitted to come more closely home, and thereby to be productive of the most salutary results ; but, they were to take heed also to the messages addressed to their brethren in the churches with which they were surrounded. In this respect there was none of the churches altogether independent of another. What was spoken to Ephesus was meant to be heard by Sardis, and what was applied to Sardis was designed to be profitable to Ephesus ; for, this was the admonition :—"He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith," not unto the church, but "unto the churches."

This, of itself, is a point deserving of attention, for it seems to indicate the principle which warrants the application of the messages, originally addressed to the Seven Churches of Asia, to any other church placed in similar circumstances, or chargeable with similar corruptions, or called to the performance of similar duties.

But there is another remark which may be made on the same subject, and which has reference to the same principle. In the revelation given to the apostle, he was not to repeat by word of mouth what was spoken to him by the Spirit of Almighty God, but he was "to write it in a book, and to send it to the Seven Churches which are

in Asia ; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea ;" and it will be observed, that the command to write is repeated seven times, or, in other words, it forms the introduction to each of the messages to the churches. Now, for this, there is, no doubt, a substantial reason, and this reason it is by no means difficult to discover. Had the great Redeemer been looking only to the interests of the Seven Churches of Asia, he could easily have found instruments for making known to them the revelation of his own will by word of mouth ; but when he instructed the apostle to write the messages in a book, it was unquestionably intended that they should be preserved. And why ? Not merely that the Churches of Asia might obtain the benefit of them, whilst holding in their possession the very words which the lips of Christ himself had uttered ; but that, being written down in a book, they might be transmitted entire, and without alteration, and unimpaired to their children, and to their children's children, and to generations that are yet unborn.

And what is the inference we are warranted to deduce from these two facts,—1st, That what was addressed to one of the churches, was to be listened to by them all ; and, 2nd, That the messages themselves, instead of being merely spoken, and thereby passing into speedy forgetfulness, were written down and preserved ? The inference is this, that they are susceptible of application also to ourselves. All Scripture, or everything that has been written by the inspiration of God, is profitable for doctrine, for reproof,

for correction, for instruction in righteousness; and whatsoever has been addressed in old time unto other churches, by holy men, even as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, is both fitted and intended to convey unto us the same important lessons which were taught unto them. And as we consider the messages to the churches in regular succession, it may tend to render the lessons which they teach more profitable to ourselves, if we bear it distinctly and constantly in remembrance, that whatever is applicable to one branch of the Church of Christ, when considered in the light of a community, applies also to each of the individuals of whom the community is composed. We are not therefore at liberty to shelter ourselves under vague generalities—to acknowledge the short comings, or the defections, or the positive abuses of the Christian community to which we belong, when considered simply in its corporate capacity; but at the same time to feel and to act, as if personally we were free from the imputation of all blame, and were altogether guiltless. If we are members of a church, we can never be considered as solitary or isolated individuals, who have no other interests but our own to attend to, and whose responsibility is strictly confined to ourselves. On the contrary, we stand associated with our brethren, partaking with them in their privileges, and in a certain sense sharing with them in their sins. For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so is it with the Church of Christ, insomuch, that whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it, or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it.

In this respect a very solemn responsibility is resting not alone on the ministers and elders of the church with which we are connected, but upon every individual member. Whatever be the position which he occupies, he is in danger, by every temptation to which he yields, by every sin which he commits, by every ordinance he profanes, by every duty he neglects, of at once hurting the interests of his own soul, and materially affecting the well-being of the whole church. One man, and that too by a solitary act of transgression, and an act, moreover, which may be carefully concealed from the observation of his fellow-men, may be the occasion, as in the case of Achan in the camp of Israel, of bringing wrath, not upon himself alone, but upon a whole community,—and wrath which may continue to be felt till the accursed thing is found out, and repented of, and utterly removed.

But a man, upon the other hand, by faithfully discharging the obligations under which he is lying, and fully exercising the important functions that belong to him as a member of the body of Christ, may become an instrument of good, of extensive good, of good to thousands besides himself. He may have no standing among the office-bearers of the Church—the Church that has been long established in this land. His name may never be enrolled among the members either of its General Assemblies, or of any of its subordinate courts. The duty of deliberating and of voting upon all questions having reference to the government of the church, may be devolved mainly upon other men. But in their decisions he is deeply and personally interested, inasmuch as everything that affects the well-being of the church at large,

is most likely to bear, either directly or indirectly, on the interests of each individual member that belongs to it. And not only so, but the decisions of the highest of our ecclesiastical courts are not the judgments merely of a certain number of ministers and elders, going there with a written commission, and acting and deliberating only for themselves. In a certain sense they are the decisions of the entire church. Every individual brought within the pale of her communion, or admitted to the enjoyment of her ordinances, has not only interests for time and eternity, which may be affected by such decisions, but he has also a certain share in the responsibility of the decisions themselves. He has a voice which may be heard either for, or against them. Though he were the poorest or the humblest individual that has ever worshipped within the walls of any of her tabernacles, yet on his voice the entire decisions even of the most solemn and important of all our Assemblies may depend—on his voice the extinction, or the stability of the Church itself may be hanging. That voice may not be heard in the place where the solemn Assembly meets, nor may it be audible to any mortal ear. It may arise from the profoundest depths of a contrite and a broken spirit, or from the solitude and the stillness of some little chamber, where prayer is wont to be made ; and yet that voice may have more power than the weightiest arguments that were ever urged within the walls of the Venerable Assembly itself. It may have power not indeed to bear directly upon the understandings and the consciences of a large multitude of men met together for the most solemn purposes, but to prevail before the throne, and in the upper sanctuary, and in the audience of that mighty Being, who has the government

of all worlds on his shoulders, and the hearts of all men in his hands, and who can turn them whithersoever he will. It were well if all the members of the church, without exception, were alive to their own responsibility in this respect, and were only persuaded, in a spirit of strong faith, to avail themselves to the full extent of the high privileges placed within their reach, and to put forth without let or hinderance, and to its utmost range, the vast and stupendous influence that belongs to every man of prayer, every heir of the promises, every child of God. Surely, in that case there would be much less of the appalling difficulties, the divisions of sentiment, and the distracting controversies which so materially interfere with the operations of the church's most important schemes; and much more of the unity of feeling, and the concentration of power, so desirable at any time, but more especially in these days of trouble, and blasphemy, and rebuke. By means of the fervent and united intercessions of a believing people the ministers and office-bearers of the church would be strengthened for the faithful and efficient discharge of the duties, however difficult and responsible, to which they are called, and the golden censer, which has already received the contribution of many prayers for the well-being of our beloved Sion, being filled up speedily, and presented with the incense of the Saviour's righteousness before the throne, might prevail to the opening of the windows of heaven, that so the dark clouds that are now thickening around us, may come down in showers of the richest blessing, turning the wilderness into a fruitful field, and the fruitful field into a forest, and making the very desert to rejoice and to blossom as the rose.

CHAPTER II.

SYMBOLIC LANGUAGE.

THE symbolic language, applied both to the churches of Asia, and to the ministers to whom the oversight of them was committed, is very striking and significant. The former are likened unto golden candlesticks, in the midst of which the great Redeemer is represented as walking, and the latter as radiant stars which he holdeth in his right hand. For John was commanded to write the mystery of the seven stars, and the seven golden candlesticks, while it is added by way of explanation, "the seven stars are the angels of the Seven Churches, and the seven candlesticks, are the Seven Churches."

Let us turn our attention to these comparisons. The Seven Churches are likened to golden candlesticks, and the aptness of the comparison will appear, whether we consider the materials of which they were composed, or the purposes for which they were used. As to the materials:—they were not made of clay which could easily be broken, nor of wood which might speedily be consumed, nor of any common substance which might be estimated at little value, nor of any thing of a rude description presenting an unsightly appearance. The material was gold, the metal which of all others is the most precious, the most brilliant, and the most durable. In all these respects it forms an appropriate emblem of

the Church of Christ. For nothing can be more precious: the price with which it has been purchased is nothing less than the blood of the only begotten Son of God—nothing can be more brilliant: it is fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners—nothing can be more durable: it is built on the Rock of Ages against which even the gates of hell shall never be able to prevail. The material, too, however precious and durable in itself, was not left in its natural condition, but was purified as in a furnace from every thing like alloy, and wrought into the form of a candlestick; and this adds to the beauty and appropriateness of the emblem. For what is the use of a candlestick? It is not of itself the cause or the source of light, but it is the instrument by means of which the light is brought into a right position, or displayed to the greatest advantage, or diffused to the widest extent, or conveyed with readiness into places that are altogether dark. If a light be put under a bushel, it will have no effect in dispelling the darkness, and the light itself will speedily be extinguished. But if it be put on a candlestick it will give light to all that are in the house, and may, peradventure, be observed by those that are without. Hence the church is likened to a candlestick; it does not create the light, but it holds it forth—it diffuses it—it spreads it abroad.

But whilst the Seven Churches are represented by golden candlesticks, their angels or ministers are likened unto stars. And why? The reason is obvious. It is, we conceive, first of all, because it is their province to give light. The light, indeed, does not belong essentially to themselves. For naturally they are in the same condition

as other men, being lovers of the darkness rather than the light, because their deeds are evil ; and remaining in that state they had either devoted themselves altogether to the unfruitful works of darkness, or, if arrogating to themselves the character and position of stars, they must have been such as are adverted to in the epistle of Jude—"wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever." But they are lights in the midst of the golden candlesticks—lights that have the semblance of stars, by reason of the holiness unto which they have been begotten again, the divine illumination to which they have been subjected, the unction they have received from the Holy One, insomuch that their own path is like the light of the morning, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day. And they are so also, and more particularly in their official character as ministers of the everlasting gospel, and by virtue of the truths they are commissioned to proclaim. They are set up and ordained, not for the purpose of preaching themselves, as if they were independent of a higher power, but with the view of disseminating the truth as it is in Jesus, directing the guiltiest and most miserable of the children of men unto Christ's cross, which is the wisdom of God, and the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth ; pointing the most erring and the most ignorant unto Christ's word, which is fitted to be a light unto their feet, and a lamp unto their path, guiding them into the ways of peace ; and leading the least experienced, and the most wayward unto Christ himself, who is the way, and the truth, and the life, a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of his people Israel.

And not only are they lights in the world, inasmuch as both by the principles they exemplify, and the doctrines which they preach, they hold forth the word of righteousness in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, but they are lights of a peculiar kind. They are stars—stars whose appropriate orbit is the firmament of heaven. In this respect, also, the emblem is full of meaning. For while it is the province of a star to give light, the star itself is in its own nature celestial. It appears from its elevation to be inaccessible to the contamination of earthly things. Its path lies amid the solemn and stupendous glories of a higher sphere. It seems to speak to us of the things that are above, and the light which it casts upon the darkness of this lower world is kindled by the hand that is divine. The agency of no mortal instrument has been there. It is the light of heaven. And thus it is, not indeed with every man who professes to be a minister of Christ, but of every minister who has himself been illuminated by the influence of God's Holy Spirit, and whom Christ hath not only placed in the midst of the golden candlesticks, but whom he holdeth in his right hand. He is not only a burning and a shining light, but he is a radiant star, giving light to a benighted world, when Christ himself the Sun of Righteousness is away; and when the perishing sinner is cast loose as it were on a dark and troubled ocean, out of sight of every earthly beacon, and toiling amid the rending billows, without a compass and without a chart, he, like the polar star that is shining in the firmament of heaven, is set forth to guide the frail and perishing bark into the calm and shelter of a quiet haven.

Such, even now is the position and the bearing of those who in deed and in truth are the angels of Christ's Churches. What has been written by one, at once distinguished for her high rank, and her Christian attainments, as expressive of her own idea of an ordinary Christian, is peculiarly descriptive of them—"They are not like those who are looking up from earth to heaven, but like those who are looking down from heaven upon earth."—(Lady Powerscourt.) In fact their conversation—their citizenship is in heaven, that so they may be the instruments of alluring their fellow-men from all that is earthly, and sinful, and perishing, and attracting their best affections, by the sanctity of their lives, the purity of their doctrine, and the heavenliness of their spirit, to the glories of that higher world, where there is a fulness of joy, and pleasures which are at God's right hand for ever. And the more faithfully they give themselves to the discharge of their important functions amid the services of the sanctuary that is below, the better prepared will they be for the high destiny that awaits them amid the splendour of the temple that is above; for "they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever."

But the full meaning of the figures applied both to the Churches of Asia, and to the ministers set over them in the Lord, can only be brought out by reference to the golden Candlestick made use of in the service of the Tabernacle under the law. Of this we have a minute description in Exodus xxxvii. 17—24; from which it appears that it consisted of one stem, having a number of

branches, and containing seven lamps. And as the Tabernacle had no windows, and must otherwise have been involved in perpetual darkness, it was ordained, that the children of Israel should bring pure olive oil, "to cause the lamp to burn always in the Tabernacle of the congregation, without the veil, which is before the testimony;" whence we infer, that the light was never to go out, that one at least of the lamps was always to be kept burning. Besides, it was the province of Aaron, in his official character as the High Priest, to dress the lamps, supplying them at regular intervals with oil, and keeping them burning by day and by night. Thus the candlestick itself, notwithstanding the costliness of the material of which it was made, and the beauty and splendour of the workmanship with which it was adorned, would not have been complete without the seven lamps, and even the lamps would have been useless if they had not been furnished with oil, and lighted up through the instrumentality of the High Priest. It was only when the candlestick with all its branches was complete, and when, moreover, all its lamps were furnished with fresh oil, and burning with living fire, that it fully answered the purposes for which it was designed, and was instrumental in diffusing a brilliant illumination through the dark Tabernacle.

Now, it is by referring to the golden candlestick thus used in the service of the tabernacle under the law, that we are best able to clear up and explain the symbolic language applied to the Churches of Asia. What the apostle saw in the vision, was not, we conceive, seven separate candlesticks, but rather, as seems to be

indicated by the original, seven lamp-bearers, or in other words, a representation of the golden candlestick of the tabernacle, whose seven lamps, though placed apart from each other, were all proceeding from one stalk. In like manner, though the Seven Churches of Asia might be different from each other, both in point of locality and in powers of usefulness, each having its own light and its own minister, yet they were not distinct or separate churches. They were neither independent of their great Head, nor unconnected with the feeblest members of his body. They were all resting on the same basis, all superintended by the same High Priest. And it was only when He was walking in the midst of them that they could hold forth the word of righteousness in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, or keep alive amongst themselves the things that were ready to die. And hence, Christ himself, as the great Apostle and High Priest of their profession, is represented in the vision in the very act of lifting the golden candlestick, as if he had just furnished it with oil, and lighted it up; and as he holds it forth in his right hand, and walks along with it, he seems himself in the midst of the golden branches, encompassed with lamps of fire, and environed with a constellation of stars.

Thus, it will be observed, that there is a very close connexion between Christ and the Church he has purchased with his blood. Were it otherwise, there would be no grounds for her stability, and no protection from the assaults of her enemies. But so long as the presence of Christ is with her, no serious evil will be permitted to overtake her. Thousands, indeed, may lift

up the heel against her, and the whole craft and policy of hell may be brought into requisition, for the purpose of forging weapons to assail her on every side. Nay, she may be brought into the greatest straits, and compassed about with the mightiest difficulties, and cast into a furnace that has been seven times heated, but, with the great Redeemer in the midst of her, she can suffer no essential detriment. The power of the fiercest persecution, or the fire of the hottest furnace, may bring her to a deeper conviction of her own helplessness, and teach her the folly of trusting to an arm of flesh; but the action of the furnace will cause the light of eternal truth to blaze forth with a clearer flame from the lamps of the golden candlestick, and even the gold of the candlestick itself will stand the violence of the fire, and shine forth in the midst of it with a brighter lustre than before. For he who walketh in the midst of the golden candlesticks is the faithful witness, the first-begotten from the dead, the prince of the kings of the earth, who is, and who was, and who is to come—the Almighty—and while his eyes are like a flame of fire, his feet like burnished brass, his voice as the sound of many waters, and his countenance like the sun shining in its strength, he condescends to say to his desponding disciple, and through him to all the members of his body:—"Fear not, I am the First and the Last, I am he that liveth, and was dead, and, behold, I 'am alive for evermore, Amen, and have the keys of hell and of death."

And while the great Redeemer is thus walking in the midst of the golden candlesticks, taking the oversight of all their interests, sustaining them in the furnace of

affliction, and preserving them from destruction, nothing can be more elevated or more secure than the position which is assigned to their angels—their ministers—their stars. Them he not only illuminates with his divine light, and places in the midst of the golden candlesticks, and supplies from day to day with the oil of his own Holy Spirit; but he keeps them as the apple of his eye, and even holds them in his own right hand. And there they are as safe, as free from the risk of destruction, and as incapable of extinction by the violence of any earthly power, as are the radiant stars that are shining afar off in the lofty and the boundless firmament of heaven.

Hence we may perceive what are the true grounds of the church's stability, and the real glory of the church's ministers. Neither the one nor the other can rest with firmness and security on any earthly power, however strong, unless it so happen at the same time, that Christ is walking in the midst of the one, and holding the other in his right hand. That is the thing which it is of greatest importance to secure, the presence, the oversight, the protection of Christ: yet, this we have no right to reckon on, unless there be a close and stedfast adherence to the truth as it is in Jesus, and a holding forth, without compromise and without reserve, of the fundamental doctrines, both of his cross and his supremacy. If we fail to do this, the Church with which we are connected can have no resemblance to the golden candlestick in the midst of which Christ walketh; nor can its ministers have any likeness to the radiant stars which he holdeth in his right hand: and instead of standing like a wall of fire round about us, we have

reason rather to dread that he will fight against us with the sword of his Spirit, or spue us out of his mouth, or dash us in pieces like a potter's vessel.

But if it be our constant aim, and our ruling principle, as well in every duty we perform, as in every privilege we enjoy, to recognize the presence, to bow to the authority, to maintain the supremacy of our great and glorified Redeemer, there cannot be a doubt that he will continue to walk in the midst of us, and to hold us in his right hand : and whether the golden candlestick shall be established, as heretofore, in a quiet habitation, or removed from the venerated temples where our fathers have been wont to worship, yet, if the presence of the great Redeemer go along with it, it will still be, and that amid the darkness, and the solitude, and the waste places of the wilderness, like the pillar of the cloud by day, and the pillar of the fire by night, shedding light for the guidance of the steps of Israel through the trials and the sorrows that are before them, while it spreads disorder and alarm among the hosts of Egypt that are pursuing them from behind,—and never ceasing to cheer and to direct them, till they have passed over the waters of Jordan, and entered within the precincts of that promised land, where there shall be nothing to hurt or to offend, and where there shall be no night, and where they need no candle, neither light of the sun, nor of the moon to shine in it : for the glory of God doth lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof.

CHAPTER III.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES.

IN regard to every one of the Churches of Asia, there is something embodied in the revelation given to the Apostle John, that is peculiar and distinctive. But before considering in detail what is specially applicable to each, it may be at once interesting and profitable, to advert to a few points of a somewhat general character—points which are not peculiar to one church more than to another but which apply equally to them all. With this view we remark,

1st. That all the messages to the churches are addressed in the first instance to the angels, or ministers. The first commences thus :—"Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write."—The second : "and unto the angel of the church in Smyrna, write."—The third : "and unto the angel of the church in Pergamos, write." And so in like manner, in regard to the angels of the churches of Thyatira, and Sardis, and Philadelphia, and Laodicea. In this respect all the churches were treated in precisely the same way. They were all under the pastoral superintendence of particular ministers ; and these ministers were the instruments recognized by the Divine Redeemer, for the purpose of conveying his messages to the churches. On them, therefore, rested a most solemn responsibility. They were the angels, or the messengers of Christ ; and

the part of a faithful messenger is to deliver the message he has received just as it is. He is not to add to it, nor yet is he to take away from it : he is neither to divest it of its real meaning, nor to cast any part of it unduly into the shade, nor to substitute any thing of his own in the place of it, with the view of rendering it more agreeable to the corruptions or the prejudices of the people to whom he is sent. In regard to matters such as these, he is not placed in an independent position. He is the servant—the ambassador of Christ. And whatever be the reception which his message meets with, whatever be the opposition which it encounters, though the malignity of a world lying in wickedness should display itself in the form of the fiercest persecution, and the gates of hell itself should set themselves in array against it, still on his part there can be no compromise without incurring the most fearful hazard. For, if he mutilate the doctrines of God's incorruptible word, or tamper with the integrity of eternal truth, he stands chargeable with the foulest sacrilege. He is bearing false witness against his master. He is making God himself a liar. He is declaring in God's name what the divine word does not sanction, and what the Holy Spirit cannot acknowledge as his own, and thereby subjecting himself to the vengeance of his righteous judgments.

But, if upon the other hand, and under a due sense of his own responsibility, he takes care to regulate his principles according to the standard of eternal truth, and gives utterance in his official character to no opinion that is not in strict accordance with the word of God, then in that case, he is declaring what the Church of Christ is

bound by the most solemn obligations to receive, and to carry out, and at all hazards to maintain. And not only so, but they by whom the message is refused, or set aside, or trampled under foot, are putting themselves in the same position, as if God himself had been speaking to them face to face, and they, notwithstanding, had the hardihood to rush upon the thick bosses of his buckler, and in a spirit of defiance to reject his counsel against themselves.

2. All the messages to the churches are either accompanied, or concluded with an admonition applicable to each of their members. It was said to the Church of Ephesus, "He that hath an ear let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches;" and the same words, without the slightest alteration, are repeated in the messages to the Churches of Smyrna, and Pergamos, and Thyatira, and Sardis, and Philadelphia, and Laodicea. Hence, though the messages were directed, first of all to the ministers, so that theirs was the duty of imparting the truths they contained, faithfully and without compromise to the people; yet the responsibility was not confined exclusively to them: it extended to each individual member of the churches,—to every man, in short, who had an ear to hear. And while it was the part of the one to take heed as to what they preached, it was no less the duty of the other to take heed how they heard. Thus on the part of the ministers there might be the strictest faithfulness. The messages which they delivered might be in perfect accordance with the standard of eternal truth, and as soon as they were distinctly announced, or fully proclaimed, the burden of

responsibility might be in a great measure lifted off from their shoulders. But it did not fall to the ground. It was transferred to another party, and laid on the souls of the people. And so it is now. If, therefore, on the part of those who hear, the messages of the gospel are received in the exercise of a true faith, and personally applied, and carefully treasured up, and practically acted upon, they will minister to their present comfort, their spiritual improvement, and their everlasting life. But if they turn a deaf ear to them altogether, or if, while they profess to listen to them, they do it with a spirit of carelessness, or of irreverence, or of formality, or of unbelief, they are not only neglecting the great salvation, and acting as if they reckoned the blood of Christ to be an unholy thing, but they are setting themselves in the posture of resistance, and doing despite to the Spirit of all grace. And while in that case, the word, even now, is unto them the savour of death unto death, instead of the savour of life unto life, it is not to be doubted, that, unless they turn from their evil courses, and attend in right earnest to the things that relate to their eternal peace, their blood at last will be required at their own hands.

3. All the messages to the churches are issued with the authority of Christ as their supreme Head. In every one of the messages to the Seven Churches, there is the assumption on the part of Christ of some title of Majesty, which proves that they are subject to his authority, and shews that He is to be had in reverence of all that are round about him. The titles, indeed, are not precisely the same. On the contrary, they are every one of them

different, and that for this obvious and important reason, that they might be specially adapted to the circumstances of each individual church. The Church of Ephesus, for example, was betraying the incipient symptoms of apostacy, for the solemn admonition was addressed to her :—"Remember from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works, or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent." And therefore Christ revealed himself unto her, in the character of the great High Priest, who was holding the stars in his right hand, and walking in the midst of the golden candlesticks. The Church of Smyrna was verging on a state of dreadful persecution, and unto her was addressed the language, not of warning, but of encouragement. "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." And therefore it was meet that Christ should present himself unto her, as "the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive." The Church of Pergamos was charged with the relaxation of discipline, and the toleration of false doctrine. For the threatening was recorded against her :—"Repent, or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth." Therefore it was most appropriate that Christ should manifest himself unto her, as "He which hath the sharp sword with two edges." The Church of Thyatira was infected with the guilt of idolatry, insomuch, that the awful judgment was denounced against the main instrument of her sin :—"I will cast her into great tribulation, and will kill her children with death, and all the

churches shall know that I am He which searcheth the reins and hearts." And what could be more suitable than Christ's addressing himself unto her, as "the Son of God, who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet like fine brass?" The Church of Sardis was distinguished by a spirit of formality, having a name to live, while she was dead. For she was exhorted to remember how she had received, and heard, and to hold fast, and to repent, lest Christ should come upon her as a thief in the night, or at an hour when she knew not. Therefore Christ made himself known unto her, as "He that hath the seven spirits of God, and the seven stars." The Church of Philadelphia was characterized for her fidelity. For she had kept the word of God, and had not denied his name; and the promise was given to her:—"I will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth." Therefore Christ spoke comfortably unto her, as "He that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth and no man shutteth, and shutteth and no man openeth." And the Church of the Laodiceans was noted for her blindness, her spiritual pride, and her lukewarmness, insomuch, that the great Redeemer testified against her, saying:—"I will spue thee out of my mouth." And, in token of his faithfulness in the fulfilment of his threatenings, he spoke unto her, as "the Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the beginning of the creation of God."

Thus Christ revealed himself with powers and prerogatives admirably adapted to the trials, the corruptions,

or the prospects of each individual church ; and though these prerogatives are not precisely the same, and the title is different in every case, there is yet this characteristic in regard to them all, that they proceed upon the assumption, that he was their supreme and only Head, who had a sovereign right to exercise authority over them, and unto whom they were at all times and in all circumstances subordinate. And when we find that this expression also is made use of in regard to the Church of Ephesus, and repeated in the case of all the rest :—"I know thy works," we conclude, not only that he is invested with the character of their supreme Head, but that in that character he is perpetually exercising the prerogatives that belong to him, keeping his eye upon them every moment, and subjecting all their works, whether they be good or evil, to such a rigid scrutiny as enables him in the present world to provide against every emergency, and to give unto each of them in the end, according as their deeds shall be.

These are important truths, and were they only distinctly realized, and universally acted upon, both the world and the church would be in a very different position from what they actually are. But they are truths which men are very apt to misunderstand, or to explain away, or to throw altogether into the shade. They may admit in general terms that Christ is the faithful witness and the final judge, and perhaps they may allow, that within the precincts of the eternal world, or in the presence of the principalities of heaven, he is entitled to the crown, and the sceptre, and the

throne of universal dominion. But when the doctrine is clearly announced, and earnestly maintained, that Christ is the supreme and only Head of the Church on earth, insomuch, that in regard to all matters relating to its constitution and its government, there is no authority that is paramount to his, and not only so, but that the highest and most honourable character which can ever be held by the mightiest of this world's potentates, is that of ministers for good to the Church which he has purchased with his blood, then all this is denounced as nothing less than the offspring of the wildest extravagance, or as the dogma of a fanaticism too monstrous to be tolerated amongst reasonable men. No man, however, who knows any thing either of the corruption of human nature, or of the principles of God's word, will be surprised at this. It is just what the Bible itself hath prepared us to expect. For it tells us in plain language, "that the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." Nor do we know a doctrine which, from its very nature, can be more abhorrent to the prejudices of worldly and ungodly men, and more obnoxious to the powers and principalities of hell than this, that the crown of supremacy should be placed on the head of the crucified Redeemer, and that his sceptre should extend and be upheld over the world that disowns his authority, as well as over the church he hath purchased with his blood. That, however, is the doctrine of the Bible, a doctrine which no enlightened believer can impugn, and which hosts of the noblest martyrs have vindicated with their blood. The

workers of iniquity may disbelieve it, or they may cast contempt upon it, or they may stoutly resist it ; for the life of every ungodly man is one continued act of rebellion against Christ's supremacy. But they can never alter the fact, nor blot one single sentence from the standards of eternal truth, or detract one single iota from the powers which rightfully and everlastingly belong to the great Redeemer. They may shut their eyes against the light, and rush headlong against the thick bosses of his buckler, and bring down upon themselves the doom of an everlasting banishment from his presence, and from the glory of his power. But Christ, notwithstanding, is not only the Head of his own church, but he is the Prince of the kings of the earth ; and this consideration is brought prominently forward in the messages to the churches, that all their members might be duly impressed with a sense of its high and paramount importance, and that even, though the kings of the earth and the rulers should take counsel together, setting themselves against the Lord and his Anointed, and employing their power to break his bands asunder, they should still look to the authority of Christ as superior to every other, cleaving, at all hazards, to the sacred principles he hath propounded, and bearing it in everlasting remembrance, that his throne is fixed upon a loftier elevation than that of the mightiest of earthly monarchs,—that seated upon his holy hill of Sion, he is the Head of all principalities and powers, to whose jurisdiction all mortal beings are subordinate, and at whose bar every one of them must stand. For he is the supreme and only potentate, on whose head is the lustre

of many crowns, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and on whose vesture, the name is written,—King of kings and Lord of lords.

4. All the messages to the churches contain a special promise to the faithful, or to those that overcome. None of the Churches of Asia was in a state either of perfection or tranquillity. In all of them there were the elements both of corruption and of strife. Hence this remarkable peculiarity in regard to the promise addressed to the faithful in every one of these churches : it is a promise to them that overcome—a promise, not to those who are regaling themselves amid the calm and serenity of a state either of carnal or spiritual repose, but to warriors girded with armour, grappling with corruption, and fighting for victory. For example, in the Church of Ephesus there were the pretensions of false apostles that were to be tried, the deeds also of the Nicolaitanes that were to be hated and abjured. For this, therefore, a battle must be fought ; and, therefore, the promise is :—“To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.” In the Church of Smyrna there was the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, but are the synagogue of Satan, persecuting the saints of God, and casting some of them into prison that they might be tried. Here also a struggle was to be encountered, and a victory to be achieved, and therefore the promise is :—“He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.” In the Church of Pergamos there were the teachers of false doctrines—doctrines tending to idolatry—the very doctrines of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumbling-block

before the children of Israel. Here also were the materials of disorder, and the occasion for resistance even unto blood, as in the case of Antipas, Christ's faithful martyr, who was slain in the midst of them. And hence, this is the promise :—"To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he which receiveth it." In the Church of Thyatira there was the corruption of the woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, teaching and seducing the servants of God to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols. Here again was a ground for resistance, and a reason for contending, and for contending earnestly, for the faith once delivered to the saints ; and, therefore, the promise is to the rest in Thyatira, even to as many as hold not this doctrine, and which have not known the depths of Satan :—"He that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations, and he shall rule them with a rod of iron ; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers, even as I received of my Father, and I will give him the morning star." In the Church of Sardis there were those who had a name to live, but were dead, in the midst of whom the interests of vital religion were suffering, and the things that remained were ready to die. Here also the few who had not defiled their garments had a hard battle to fight, and the mightiest opposition to subdue ; and, therefore, the promise is :—"He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment, and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and

before his angels." In the Church of Philadelphia there was faithfulness within, but tribulation from without—tribulation from the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie. Therefore, it behoved them to hold fast what they had, that no man might take their crown ; and to them also this was the promise :—
" Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out, and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is New Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God, and I will write upon him my new name." And finally, in the Church of Laodicea, which was so abhorrent in the eye of the great Redeemer that he threatened to spue her out of his mouth, there seemed to be some whom he loved, and rebuked, and chastened. Theirs, too, by reason of the wide-spread corruption must have been a time, not of inaction and repose, but of bold and vigorous striving for the mastery ; and, therefore, this also was the promise :—
" To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me on my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father on his throne."

Thus the promise in all the messages to the churches is addressed to them that overcome. The battle they are called to fight may be waged with different enemies, and fought upon a different field. But whether it arise from the violence of persecution from without, or from the working of corruption from within, there must be a fighting of the good fight of faith, on the part of all who would lay hold of the eternal crown. And whether the joy set before them be represented by the figure of a

tree of life, or of a white stone, or of a morning star, or a new name, or a white robe, or a crown of life, or a throne of glory, still there must be the encounter of a battle, and the gaining of a victory. For the promise unto all the faithful in the churches is :—"Unto him that overcometh."

Is it so with us? Are we actually engaged in the Christian warfare, giving a determined resistance to every sinful principle, striving day by day with the power of indwelling corruption, and wrestling vigorously with flesh and blood, with principalities and powers, with the rulers of the darkness of this world, with spiritual wickedness in high places, with all the might and the policy of hell? If it be so, the presence of the Divine Redeemer will be with us to guide, to encourage, and to strengthen us; and though, in submitting ourselves to his supreme authority, and vindicating the principles of his righteous government, we may expose ourselves to the opposition of a world lying in wickedness, and may find it necessary to clothe ourselves with the whole armour of God, and to resist even unto blood, striving against sin, yet, in that case we shall be brought within reach of the most animating promises—promises which are specially provided, not for those who are resigning themselves to a spirit of carnal security, entertaining a false charity, and slumbering at the post of duty while the hosts of the enemy are around them, but for those who are marshalled on the field of battle, defending the faith that was once delivered unto the saints, and proving themselves faithful even unto death.

It is for them—the conquerors who overcome through

the blood of the Lamb—that the most precious promises are now recorded, while for them also there is reserved hereafter the most glorious of destinies. For thus saith the great Redeemer, the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end :—“ He that overcometh shall inherit all things, and I will be his God, and he shall be my son.”

But are we remaining in a state of perfect peace in the midst of our possessions, neither apprehensive of any danger, nor exposing ourselves to any opposition, nor at all wishing to be disturbed, then there cannot be a doubt, that we have neither left the ranks of Christ's enemies, nor enlisted ourselves under the banners of his cross. And if, instead of fighting his battles, and maintaining the honour of his cause, we are led, through the love of this present world, or by reason of the fear of man which bringeth a snare, to sacrifice the prerogatives of that Divine Redeemer, who left the glories of his celestial throne, and devoted himself to the agonies of the cross, that he might manifest the greatness of his love, and purchase us with his own most precious blood, then in that case we can never succeed in tarnishing the lustre of his crown, but we shall implicate ourselves in the guilt of his blood ; and when the last day comes, instead of wearing the victor's crown, and joining the armies of heaven that are following after him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, and having palms of victory in their hands, we must take our places with the kindreds of the earth, who are looking upon his wounds, and wailing everlastingly because of him. Even so, Amen,

CHAPTER IV.



THE CHURCH OF EPHEBUS.

THE Church of Ephesus was favoured with very high privileges, having enjoyed the ministrations of Apollos, who is described as an eloquent man and mighty in the Scriptures, being instructed in the way of the Lord, and fervent in the Spirit—of Timothy, who, from a child, had known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus—of Tychicus, whom Paul speaks of as a beloved brother, and a faithful minister, and a fellow-servant in the Lord—and of Paul himself, who not only wrote to them, his epistle to the Ephesians being addressed to that church, but who laboured amongst them for a period of three years, and that with such

evident and distinguished success, that the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified, and the word of God grew mightily and prevailed, and the whole city was filled with confusion, the followers of the goddess Diana saying one to another, "ye see and hear that not alone at Ephesus, but almost throughout all Asia, this Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people, saying that they be no gods that are made with hands : so that not only this our craft is in danger to be set at nought, but also that the temple of the great goddess Diana should be despised, and her magnificence should be destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worshippeth." And we may judge of the extent of his ministerial success, even in that idolatrous city, by the parting address which he delivered to the elders of the church when on the eve of setting out for another place—"Ye know, from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons, serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears and temptations, which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews, and how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have showed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house ; testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.—And now, behold, I know that ye all among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more ; wherefore I take you to record this day that I am pure from the blood of all men : for I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God. Take heed therefore, unto

yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the Church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing, grievous wolves shall enter in among you, not sparing the flock ; also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore, watch and remember, that by the space of three years, I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears ; and now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified—and when he had thus spoken, he kneeled down, and prayed with them all, and they all wept sore, and fell on Paul's neck, and kissed him, sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake, that they should see his face no more." (Acts xx. 18—38.)

Putting these circumstances together, we cannot help thinking, that it must have been during the ministry of those eminent men, and more especially of the apostle Paul, that devoted, energetic, and most noble-minded man, that the zeal of the Church of Ephesus, displayed itself in a manner so remarkable as to warrant the declaration of the Divine Redeemer :—"I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil : and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars, and hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured and hast not fainted." And it was, we doubt not, at a future period, at all events, after Paul himself had left them,

and when his own prediction was fulfilled as to the coming in amongst them of false teachers speaking perverse things, and drawing disciples after them, that they fell into the condition which exposed them to the merited rebuke :—" Nevertheless, I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love." For, notwithstanding of the high privileges they had enjoyed, and the works they had brought forth in times past, and the labour to which they had submitted, and the long-suffering patience they had displayed, and the faithful discipline they had exercised, and the false doctrine they had hated and denounced, there were now the symptoms of back-sliding or degeneracy. And wherein did this degeneracy consist, or in what way did it display itself? Not in an entire cessation from all labour in regard to that which was good, nor yet in the want of all firmness and fidelity in resisting and putting down that which was evil. For it was still said to them :—" This thou hast that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitanes which I also hate." In other words, there might still be amongst them the appearance of activity and zeal in opposing the opinions and the practices of a most dangerous sect of false teachers—men imbued with the eastern philosophy, " imputing their wickedness to God as its cause, holding a multitude of fables concerning the generation of angels, and the creation of the world by subordinate powers," while at the same time they were distinguished by the gross profligacy and licentiousness of their lives,—men, moreover, whose seductions were more to be dreaded, because it seemed to be their great policy, not to deny the truth altogether, but to graft upon it the corruptions

of another system, in such a way and to such an extent, as might leave something like the semblance of what was right, and at the same time afford a pretext to themselves for the practice of what was wrong.

But, while the Church of Ephesus might be active and indefatigable as ever in her opposition to the corruptions of these false teachers, there was something like the symptom of decay in the vital principle by which all activity and zeal should be directed, the principle of genuine charity—the principle of love. Here therefore was a most grievous defect ; they were wanting in what may be regarded as one of the main principles of the Christian life—a principle without which, there can be no living faith, for faith worketh by love ; nor any saving knowledge, for he that loveth not, knoweth not God, for God is love ; nor any full assurance, for perfect love casteth out fear, because fear hath torment ; nor any acceptable obedience, for though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing. And, therefore, though there might still be on the part of the Ephesian Church the appearance of labour, and of patience, and of zeal, and of endurance, yet because there was a departure from this essential principle, a falling away from her first love, and a losing sight of the motive of all right action, it was impossible that any thing could be done in a proper spirit, or could meet with acceptance on the part of the Divine Redeemer. And it was just, because, instead of rising day by day to a loftier elevation in the exercises of that celestial principle, she was in the course of declining, or of falling away from it, that she

was threatened with this judgment:—"Remember from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works, or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place." And that assuredly is a judgment of all others the most solemn and calamitous, the most earnestly to be deprecated, the most deeply to be deplored. For when the candlestick itself is removed, the High Priest with the holy oil, and the illumination of his Spirit, and the stars in his right hand, straightway girdeth up his loins and goeth along with it, leaving the temples that were once glorified with his presence, still standing it may be in their places, and attended by the ministrations of mortal men, but as entirely excluded from the light of his countenance, and from the blessing of his Spirit, as are the services and the worshippers in any of those idol temples that are erected by men that know not God, amid the habitations of darkness and of horrid cruelty.

But though the general character of the Church of Ephesus was such as to expose her to this awful judgment, the probability is, that there were some in the midst of her who would listen to the solemn admonition, and stand in awe of the recorded threatening, and who, remembering from whence they had fallen, and mourning over the growing degeneracy, would seek again, and with all earnestness of spirit, to be restored to their former state, and to return to their first love. For their encouragement a most precious promise was recorded, and that promise, having reference to enjoyments which are to be found chiefly within the interior of the eternal world, was peculiarly suited to their circumstances. For though

they might continue to labour, and to strive with all their might against the growing evil, without being able either to arrest the corruption against which they were contending, or to ward off the threatened judgment, and consequently might themselves suffer along with others in the present world in the evils arising from the removal of the candlestick, yet they were not on that account to be utterly forgotten. Compensation for all their sufferings was provided for them hereafter. And though, by reason of the withdrawal of gospel ordinances, they also, in common with the most careless and impenitent, might be exposed to a famine, not of bread and of water, but of hearing the word of the Lord, and might therefore have reason to exclaim :—"As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God ; my soul thirsteth for God, for the living God : when shall I come and appear before God ? My tears have been my meat day and night, while they continually say unto me, where is thy God ? When I remember these things, I pour out my soul in me : for I had gone with the multitude, I went with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise, with a multitude that kept holy-day."—Though this might be their experience, tears being their meat instead of the bread of life, yet the spiritual destitution was to last only for a little. Provision the most ample, the most satisfactory was laid up for them elsewhere, even in the paradise of God, amongst the trees of immortality, and by the rivers of pleasure that are flowing everlastingly from the throne of God. Hence the aptness of the promise :—"To him that overcometh will I give," not of the fulness of bread,

or the plenitude of consolation in the present world, for if the candlestick was removed, and gospel ordinances withdrawn, there must have been the pressure of scarcity and want, but "to him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God."

But whilst this must have been the ultimate destiny of every one belonging to the Church of Ephesus who was enabled to overcome, there is every reason to believe, that with regard to the great body of her people, there were no symptoms of repentance—no proofs of reformation—no returning to their first love. And of course the presence of the Divine Redeemer was withdrawn, the threatened, judgment was fulfilled, the candlestick was removed!

For what is the condition of Ephesus at the present moment? Is there any trace of its former magnificence, or any vestige of the vital Christianity that once flourished in the midst of it? In regard to this point, the most ample and conclusive evidence may be adduced. It is said, for example, by one:—"Ephesus the mart of all nations, the boast of Ionia, the eye of Asia has long been in the darkness of primitive non-existence. The streams of her commerce, like her own numerous ports, are all dried up. Even the sea has retired from the scene of desolation, and a pestilential morass, covered with mud and rushes, has succeeded to the waters which brought up the ships laden with merchandise from every country. A few heaps of stones, and some miserable mud cottages, occasionally tenanted by Turks, without one Christian residing there, are all the remains of ancient Ephesus." (*Arundell.*)

It is remarked by another :—" I found, on the plains of Ephesus, some Greek peasants, employed in pulling up tares from the wheat. It reminded me of Matt. xiii. 28. They belonged to a village at a distance, and came there to labour. Not one of them could read. No human being now lives at Ephesus, and in Aiasaluck, which may be considered as Ephesus under another name, though not on precisely the same spot of ground, there are merely a few miserable Turkish huts. The candlestick is removed out of its place. How doth the city sit solitary?" (*Pliny Fisk.*)

And these are the statements of others still :—"Where Ephesus stood, nothing now remains but the wrecks of the larger edifices. The plough has passed over the site of the city,—green corn may be seen amidst the forsaken ruins. It is a solemn, but most forlorn spot, presenting a neglected castle, a grand mosque, and a broken aqueduct, with mean cottages and ruinous buildings interspersed among wild thickets, and spreading to a considerable extent. The Ephesians are now a few Greek peasants, living in extreme wretchedness, dependence, and insensibility. The country once favoured with the presence of St. Paul, Timothy, and St. John, is now in the situation of those lands, of which it is said, darkness covers the earth, and gross darkness the people."—(*Chandler and Hartley.*)

These are the testimonies of men who had no connection with one another, who visited the spot at different times, and who have recorded severally for themselves, what they witnessed with their own eyes. And the sum and substance of their evidence is this,—that ancient Ephesus

is now in ruins,—that the candlestick is utterly removed, and that the very place where Christ's apostles preached, and where the brightest stars were shining, is at present without a church,—without a minister,—without a solitary Christian !

This, of itself, is a solemn and arresting fact ; but the fact acquires additional importance, and stands forth in a stronger light, when we bear it in remembrance, that Ephesus was the metropolis of Ionia, and one of the most magnificent cities of the ancient world ; ornamented by works of art, the finest and most elaborate that have ever been produced by the genius of mankind, embellished with buildings with which the most stupendous achievements of modern architecture can stand no comparison, and peopled by enormous multitudes, raised to a state of high refinement, and living in splendour, and affluence, and voluptuousness. Even one solitary building, the theatre erected for their amusements, was fitted up for the accommodation of at least twenty thousand spectators, and the ruins that are still remaining, bear equal testimony to the strength of its architecture, and to the magnificence of its appearance. And one solitary temple, the temple dedicated to the great goddess Diana was adorned with a hundred and twenty-seven columns of Parian marble, and so decorated with the embellishments of genius and of art, as to be reckoned one of the seven wonders of the world.

But here is the circumstance which strikes most forcibly on our minds, and proclaims as with the voice of a trumpet the most solemn and arresting of lessons. In the midst of the pomp and the splendour, the magnificent

temples, the gorgeous architecture, the stupendous places of amusement, the affluence and the vain shew of this fair and voluptuous city, there was the meeting-place of one Christian church, in the midst of whose golden candlestick Christ himself was once walking, and whose radiant stars he was holding in his right hand. And though for aught that we can tell, the members of that church may have been exceedingly limited in number, and the sanctuary where they were accustomed to celebrate their Saviour's love, and to hold sweet fellowship together, may have been in some obscure locality, or in some upper chamber, very different indeed from the magnificent temples of idolatry with which they were surrounded, yet it was the rising prosperity of that solitary, despised, and apparently insignificant church, that roused the whole population of one of the mightiest cities of the ancient world into a state of the fiercest agitation, and threatened the extinction of one of the most splendid temples of idolatry ever raised by the craft or the policy of mankind. And not only so, but it was the declension of that church from her first love, and her consequent fall, that sealed the doom of the whole city, blasted her commercial prosperity, drained her affluence to the very dregs, and laid all her temples and palaces in ruins. The voice of warning had been uttered, but the voice of warning was despised, and therefore the threatened judgment was fulfilled. The golden candlestick was removed from its place, and darkness fell upon the altar, and upon the sanctuary, which the stars in Christ's right hand did lighten. But the same candlestick which was the glory of the church, was also the palladium of the

state, and the bulwark of the city. The one departed from her first love, and she fell never more to rise again. But she fell not alone. The rod of her oppressors, the palaces of her princes, with the scenes of their voluptuousness and the glory of all their greatness, fell prostrate in the dust along with her. And, though now through all the length and the breadth of that ruined city we might listen in vain for the warning of one Christian minister, or even for the pleasing accents of one human voice, yet there is not the vestige of a broken column, nor the rude fragments of one mouldering stone, that does not seem to whisper, amid the scattered ruins and the profound and awful solitude, both to the subjects of every commonwealth, and to the members of every Christian community :—" He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches."

CHAPTER V.



THE CHURCH OF SMYRNA.

At the time when the message was addressed to the Church of Smyrna, the city itself was not only a populous, but a wealthy place ; not less distinguished for its seats of learning, and for the beauty of its situation, than for its riches, its marble palaces, and its high state of commercial prosperity. There is something, therefore, like a contrast between the state of the city, and the state of the church. The one was encompassed with splendour, and luxury, and affluence ; but the other was in a state, not only of tribulation, but of poverty. This may be regarded as descriptive of her outward condition. Her lot was cast in the midst of a rich and magnificent city,

but she herself was poor. In so far as the things of this world were concerned, her resources were of the most limited kind; and her members, instead of being composed of men of high rank, of great influence, or of noble birth, were gathered apparently from the poorest classes of society; a circumstance, which so far from operating to her disadvantage as a Church of Christ, seems rather to have contributed to her purity, her well-being, and her efficiency. At all events, she was poor in spirit. She had no high or arrogant pretensions. She was distinguished by no proud or presumptuous boasting. Hers was the attitude of one who felt that she was altogether destitute, and who had nothing to plead but her poverty. Nevertheless, that was the glory of her religious character, and the main safeguard of her religious privileges—the feeling of her own nothingness, the clear perception and the deep-grounded consciousness of her abject poverty. It was this feeling alone which could enable her to form a right estimate of the riches of the Saviour's grace, or dispose her to glory without reserve, and with an enlarged heart, in the freeness and all-sufficiency of his perfect righteousness. And this feeling appears to have been so precious in the eye of the great Redeemer, that his message to the Church of Smyrna is not only free from the language of condemnation or reproof, which cannot be said of the messages to Ephesus, and Pergamos, and Thyatira, and Sardis, and Laodicea; but what is also deserving of attention, the commendation which Christ condescended to tender to her, had reference to the very thing which she herself acknowledged and deplored. In other words she felt that she was poor, but the Divine

Redeemer declared that she was rich—rich, not perhaps, in regard to the things of time, but rich in faith, and in the blessings of the great salvation, and in the promises of the divine word, and in the consolations of the Holy Spirit, and in the hopes that are full of glory, and in the inheritance which is incorruptible, and undefiled, and which fadeth not away.

But the Church of Smyrna was not only a poor, she was also a suffering church ; and her sufferings arose in the first instance from those who are called the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews, and are not.

A synagogue is a Jewish place of worship ; and when the term is applied to the persecutors of the Church of Smyrna, it seems not only to indicate that they belonged by profession to the nation of Israel ; but that in assembling themselves together, as in a synagogue, against the Lord's anointed, and acting as the instruments of Satan, in the persecution of a Church of Christ, they were themselves acting under the impression that they were doing God service, as if they were animated only by a spirit of religious zeal, as if they felt that the cause in which they were embarked was one of the greatest sacredness. All the while they might fancy to themselves that they were the servants of God, cleaving to their ancient and distinctive privileges, and boasting of the rights that appertained to them as the chosen and peculiar people. But they were not the real Israel of God. For in their blind attachment to the rites and ceremonies which were now abolished, they had rejected the Messiah, for whose coming it was the main object of the ancient dispensation to prepare them, and were now setting them-

selves in virulent opposition to the followers of the great Redeemer, and to the churches he had purchased with his blood. These, indeed, were the men—men belonging to the nation of Israel, through whose instrumentality the early Christians were subjected to the fiercest and most intolerant persecution. The abolition of the ancient dispensation, or the extension of the gospel to the Gentiles, was what they could not brook, for it seemed to bring them down from the pre-eminence which they had so long held among the nations, and therefore they not only crucified the Lord of Glory, nailing him to the accursed tree, and assailing him in his last agonies with their mockery and their blasphemy; but when the gospel was proclaimed by the lips of his inspired apostles, and great multitudes were added daily to the church, insomuch that Satan's kingdom was shaken to the very foundations, still it was the Jews with their Scribes and Pharisees that formed themselves into the synagogue of Satan, and became the most active agents in the persecutions of these early days. Even the solemn operations of God's Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost were made the subject of their infidel derision, and the most faithful of Christ's apostles and disciples, became the victims of their reckless and blood-thirsty designs. Some of them they lacerated with stripes, some of them they cast into prison, some of them they killed with the sword, some of them they cast out of their cities and stoned to death. And these persecutions continued with unabated violence, till the measure of their own iniquity was filled up, and they were themselves subjected to the most desolating judgments of Almighty

God, the city of Jerusalem in which they gloried being completely destroyed, and their national glory utterly extinguished.

This awful catastrophe happened about the year of our Lord 68, after which the power of the Jews was greatly weakened and impaired. But the spirit of persecution did not die along with them. It was transferred into other hands. The Roman power carried on what the Jewish people had commenced, and therefore the members of the Church of Smyrna, much as they had already suffered, in common with other Christian communities, from God's ancient people, were not yet freed from the violence of persecution, or left to the peaceful and undisturbed enjoyment of their religious privileges. The prediction was literally fulfilled:—"The Devil," or the instruments which the Devil employs, "shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried, and ye shall have tribulation ten days." Ten days, meaning in prophetic language ten years, it is the opinion of some, that this has reference to the ten years persecution under Dioclesian—a persecution which took place between the 303rd and the 313th years of the Christian era, and which is deemed worthy of special notice, because distinguished by more than usual violence and ferocity. But as that persecution was yet far distant, and could not be personally realized by any that were then belonging to the Church of Smyrna, it appears to us more likely, that the ten days have reference, not to the period of persecution under Dioclesian alone, but to the successive persecutions which the Church underwent from the Roman power during the first three centuries, and which are sometimes

called the ten heathen persecutions. These, indeed, were dark and troublous times. Every engine which the most savage ferocity could wield, was brought into operation for the extinction of the Church of Christ. In one of these persecutions alone, ten thousand were crucified, and in another, forty thousand, without regard either to age or sex, were devoted to the most violent deaths. Polycarp, the angel, or minister of the Church of Smyrna, a man of heroic character, and of the highest Christian attainments, suffered among the rest. Indeed, the numbers that died for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus, are beyond calculation. The heavens above were illuminated with the fires of martyrdom, and the ground underneath was drenched with the blood of saints.

Now, considering the tribulation to which the Church of Smyrna had already been subjected on the part of the Jews, and the persecution which still awaited her on the part of the Roman power, it was not to be expected, that much comfort would fall to her lot in the present world. The cup put into her hands was mingled with the bitterness of death. And, therefore, the great Redeemer, not only revealed himself in a character well suited to her circumstances, for he spoke to her, as "the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive,"—in other words, as one who had not only suffered the agonies of death himself, but who was now alive for evermore, bearing in his own hands the keys of hell and of death, and having both the power and the disposition to sustain her in the time of her greatest straits; but he also furnished her with a promise which was well fitted to inspire her courage, and

to uphold her sinking spirit amid the pressure of the heaviest suffering, or amid the tortures of martyrdom itself: for, he said unto her :—"Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life,"—"and he that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death."

But it may tend still farther to set forth the suitability and significance of this promise, if we bear it in remembrance, that Smyrna, in ancient times, was not only distinguished for its schools of learning, whence it was named, "the grove of the eloquence of the sages, the museum of Ionia, and the domicile of the graces and the muses ;" but it had also, what in those days was deemed of great importance to the formation of the national character, an institution specially designed for the training of young men in athletic exercises, such as wrestling, and leaping, and racing, and fighting, that they might be serviceable to their country, and fitted for taking a part in the public games. These games attracted enormous multitudes of spectators, insomuch, that the stupendous amphitheatre in which they met together was generally crowded in every part, and not only so, but the spectators had the appearance of a cloud of witnesses, rising one above another to a lofty elevation, and looking down on the combatants competing with each other on the arena of conflict below. And these exhibitions, though in some respects holding the rank of amusements, were in many cases fatal to the vanquished, while the victor who had resisted unto blood, or proved himself faithful unto death, was not only greeted with the acclamations of the surrounding multitude, but a crown was placed on his head, sometimes of pine, sometimes of

parsley, sometimes of olive, sometimes of laurel ; and that crown was the badge of honour and the token of victory.

Hence the emphatic language of the Apostle Paul :—
“ Wherefore, seeing we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith, who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds ; ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.”—“ Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize ! So run that ye may obtain. And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown, but we an incorruptible. I therefore so run, not as uncertainly : so fight I, not as one that beateth the air. But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.”—“ For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day, and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.”

It was undoubtedly with reference to the same customs—customs with which they were perfectly familiar, that it was said to the persecuted members of the Church of Smyrna:—Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown; but not like that of the victors in the games, a fading—withering—corruptible crown, but a crown of life—a crown of immortality—a crown of glory, which neither the ravages of time, nor the spoliations of death can ever touch. X

Now, keeping in view the high character of the Church of Smyrna, and her manifold sufferings in the cause of Christ, it might be expected, not only that the promise addressed to her would be ultimately fulfilled, and that all her faithful members would be put in possession of the crown of life which fadeth not away, but that peradventure there might be something in the very aspect of the place where this church once stood, to show to future generations, that there is a principle of discrimination in the dealings and judgments of Almighty God. And so there is. For what is the present condition of Smyrna? This is the statement of one writer:—“Unlike to the fate of the more famous city of Ephesus, Smyrna is still a large city containing nearly one hundred thousand inhabitants, with several Greek churches; and an English and other Christian ministers have resided in it. The light has indeed become dim, but the candlestick has not wholly been removed out of its place.”—*(Keith.)* X

This is the testimony of another:—“Smyrna, with the church favoured so much beyond all the other churches of the Apocalypse, is the only city retaining

any comparison with its original magnificence. The opulence, the extent, and the population of Smyrna, are certainly much greater at present than at any former period of her history. In this respect, she is pre-eminent over the sister churches.”—(*Arundell.*)

It is said by another :—“Smyrna is still one of the most populous and flourishing cities of Asia Minor. Its situation is eminently picturesque as approached from the sea, with a front of nearly a mile in length towards the water, adorned with domes and minarets, and resembling an amphitheatre, the ruins of its castle crowning the summit of the hill. The population is variously estimated, but the lowest computation is seventy-five thousand, of which twenty-five thousand are Christians.”—(*Latrobe.*)

These are the statements of another :—“When Christianity was introduced into Smyrna, the city was in its glory, abounding in wealth, magnificent works of art, and schools of learning. It became the theatre of martyrdom, and the ground was enriched with the blood of Polycarp and others who laid down their lives for Christ. In the year 177 of the Christian era it is said to have suffered from an earthquake, the ruins of which were repaired by Marcus Aurelius. It was for a long time the scene of desolating wars waged by the Turks, and in the thirteenth century it lay in ruins, was afterwards repaired, became subject to the Ottoman power, and enjoyed an extensive commerce. It was again destroyed by an earthquake in 1688, but began to recover early in the eighteenth century. In 1814, forty thousand of its inhabitants were carried off by the plague. There are

now about two hundred Protestants in the city, while the minarets of twenty mosques rise from the ground where the blood of martyrs was shed, and the superstitions of a corrupt Christianity have been substituted for that gospel preached by the angel of the Church of Smyrna.”
—(*Fisk.*)

And, finally, it is remarked by the author of the notes in the Pictorial Bible :—“The prosperity of Smyrna is now rather on the increase than the decline ; and the houses of painted wood which were most unworthy of its ancient fame and present importance, are rapidly giving way to palaces of stone, rising in all directions, and probably ere many years have passed, the modern town may not unworthily represent the ancient city which the ancients delighted to call, ‘the lovely—the crown of Ionia—the ornament of Asia.’ ”

With these statements before us, it does certainly appear, that there is a striking contrast, between the present state of Ephesus, and the present state of Smyrna. Ephesus is in utter ruins, without a church, without a minister, without a Christian, without a solitary inhabitant. For she fell from her first love, and the candlestick was removed ! But Smyrna, though torn by political convulsions, overtaken by the ravages of war, scourged by the violence of the plague, subjected to the vengeance of the oppressor, and swallowed up, once and again, by the devouring earthquake, is in existence still, and in a state of high commercial prosperity. And though we cannot affirm that the interests of vital Christianity are flourishing in the midst of her, but on the contrary have good reason to believe that in this

respect she is very different from what she once was, yet when we dwell on the fact that twenty-five thousand of its inhabitants are Christians, at least in name, and that two hundred of these are Protestants, while the entire population amounts to the enormous multitude of nearly one hundred thousand, we can scarce resist the conviction, that there is a virtue in the prayers and the blood of Christ's martyrs that is immortal. The very place where they prosecuted their pious labours, and where their dust is reposing, is not only invested with a character of deeper sacredness, but it is defended by a bulwark of greater strength—a bulwark which in the present instance, neither war, nor pestilence, nor earthquake has been able to break down or to destroy. And if there be one thing which more than another is conservative of a city's commercial prosperity, or a country's national glory, that thing is to be found, not so much in the force of her armies, the strength of her bulwarks, or the wisdom of her counsellors, as in the religion of her people, or in the purity, the fidelity, and the vitality of the Church which Christ hath purchased with his blood. If these be wanting, as in the case of Ephesus, no power in the universe will ensure her safety, or exempt her from the righteous judgments of heaven. But if these belong to her, and be retained with firm and unyielding tenacity, even though exposed to persecution and to death, then in that case, she is encompassed with a wall of fire, and salvation is inscribed upon all her bulwarks and upon all her gates. And though the blood of her martyrs may be spilt on the ground, and one generation after another may go the way whence they shall never return,

the likelihood is that that blood, though passed out of sight, and lost apparently and for ever, will yet become the seed of the Church of Christ, which emerging from the spot in which it seemed to have been buried, and springing forth in freshness and in beauty, may scatter the blessings of its liberality over all the length and the breadth of the land, and carry them down peradventure in unbroken succession through the course of ages and of generations yet to come.

Nor are these matters of mere speculation. They are substantiated by the facts of history ; and were we called upon to fix on any secondary cause which more than another has contributed to the spread of the gospel, we should have little hesitation in pointing to the persecutions to which Christ's disciples have been subjected for righteousness' sake. It was owing to this cause, that even in primitive times many faithful and devoted men, who otherwise might have spent their lives in comparative obscurity, and confined their operations to one limited locality, have been scattered widely abroad, while roused themselves into a state of greater life and energy, insomuch that the truth has been proclaimed not only with greater power, but to a far wider extent. In this respect God has often brought light out of darkness, and order out of confusion, making even the wrath and wickedness of men to praise him, and overruling the very events which were designed for the extinction of the truth, for the purpose of fanning it into a brighter flame. The very struggles in which such men have been engaged, the faithful testimonies they have borne amid their last agonies, and even the fires of martyrdom lighted up for

their destruction have been the instruments, under the Providence of God, of attracting the attention of mankind to the great principles for which they were contending, and thereby giving to them a wider and more extended circulation. In this way the persecution, or the martyrdom of Christ's confessors has been followed with the most important results ; and many a man whose name might have been altogether unknown, whose memory might have passed into forgetfulness, and all whose pious deeds might have perished along with the dust and ashes of his mortal body, has not only been rendered immortal by the "persecution which has dragged him into fame, and chased him into heaven," but the great principles, which he had the faith and the moral heroism to vindicate and proclaim, have been brought out of their obscurity, and sent forth with such vast and stupendous power, as not only to command the attention of the mightiest nations of the earth, but to break the fetters of superstition by which millions have been held in bondage, and to bring about those glorious reformatations which have diffused the light and the tidings of the great salvation over hundreds, and thousands, and tens of thousands throughout the course of all succeeding generations.

Hence the life of any man, or the influence of his actions is not to be estimated merely by the number of his days. His days may be very few, and they may be full of evil ; and when his breath departs from his nostrils, and his body is laid in the grave, it may seem as if all that belonged to him had passed away from the earth for ever. But not so in reality. His place may

vacant, and his living voice may be heard no more. At his memory may be embalmed in the hearts of her men, and the principles which he brought out and exemplified, instead of dying along with him, and lying as it were in the same grave, may be embodied in a living form, and invested with the attributes of immortality.

The statuary may die. His body may pass into corruption. The instruments of his art may perish. His entire history may be covered with oblivion. His very name may sink into forgetfulness. Even tradition may be silent as to the place of his grave. But the statue which he traced in his mind's eye, and chiselled into the form of surpassing loveliness, and clothed as with the attributes of a living creature, is invested with something like a claim to immortality. It attracts the gaze and admiration of multitudes in succeeding generations. It becomes even a model for imitation. And thus the genius of one solitary man, though he be removed from the land of the living, and laid amid the darkness of the sepulchre, may exert its influence over the men of a thousand generations.

So it is also with the Christian, sometimes in ordinary circumstances, but more especially when called to seal his testimony with his blood. He may die—his body may return unto the dust—and generations may come and pass away since the day that he entered into his rest. Nevertheless of him, as of Abel, one of the most ancient of the saints, it may be truly said that he yet speaketh—that he yet liveth. The martyr may die, but his principles do not die along with him. For they are the

principles of the Bible, and all the principles of the Bible are eternal. Truth is eternal. Holiness is eternal. Justice is eternal. And when these principles are embodied in the personal experience of any man, he shares as it were in their immortality. And not only so, but the principles are the source of life and immortality to other men when he himself is mouldering in the grave. As it was with the dead man who started into life, and stood upon his feet, when cast into the grave and among the withered bones of Elisha, so it is also with souls that are dead in trespasses and sins. Coming into contact with the principles for which the martyrs died, they begin to breathe of their very spirit, and life entering into themselves they are quickened and revived. Thus it has often happened that amid the dust and ashes of Christ's martyred servants, there has been the exemplification of what was set forth in the vision of the Prophet Ezekiel, a shaking among the dry bones, the working of supernatural power, and the movements of a living Spirit, till in the place it may be of one buried saint, there has been seen emerging and rising as from the dead, clothed with his very mantle, and animated with his living spirit, not one isolated successor merely, but an exceeding great army, and an army moreover standing upon their feet—drawn up in battle array—all ready and prepared, not only for entering into the labours from which their predecessors have ceased, but for fighting the battles they have begun, and thereby bringing forth their judgment unto victory.

Thus there are individuals, whose lives on earth have extended only to the term of a few years, who have been

umental in the production of as much good, as they themselves had been immortal and had never l.

It is different with the wicked. They are twice dead—dead when their memory perishes and is forgotten on the earth—dead when their souls are banished from the kingdom of heaven, and shut out from the life everlasting. But the saints of God are twice alive, in a double sense they are immortal—immortal not merely in their nature, in their souls, in the elements of the spiritual life, and within the gates of the celestial city, but immortal upon the earth—immortal in their principles—immortal because the memory of their heroic exploits remains behind them, not only constituting, even to a distant posterity, the most glorious as well as the most imperishable of monuments, but imparting an impulse to other minds, which may continue to be kept up and repeated from individual to individual, and from family to family, and from generation to generation, even till the very day when the Archangel shall lift up his hand to heaven, and swear by Him that liveth for ever and ever, that time shall be no longer.

Of these things, however, we know but little at the present time. For we are of few days, and are compassed about with darkness, and the issues of futurity are altogether concealed from our view. But if even here we have discernment enough to perceive that the actions of one solitary saint are felt by millions, and extended through the course of many generations, oh what must be the triumph and the joy of those martyred servants of Christ, who are now seeing of the travail of

their souls, and tracing out the results of their struggles and their dying agonies, amid the clear light, and the imperishable records of eternity! Surely of them it may be truly said, that theirs is the kingdom of heaven, and if there be one degree of blessedness that is higher than another, would we not be justified in affirming that it is the blessedness of them that have been persecuted for righteousness' sake?

CHAPTER VI.



THE CHURCH OF PERGAMOS.

It appears, from the message to the Church of Pergamos, that she had not only held fast the name of Christ, and had not denied his faith, but that she did so, when placed in circumstances of peculiar difficulty and trial. For observe, first of all, the locality where her lot had been cast. She was not situated, as we are, amid all the external advantages of a professedly Christian community, encouraged and protected by laws which are founded in a great measure in the principles of rational and undefiled religion, and where the assumption of the Christian name, or the profession of attachment to the cause of the Divine Redeemer, can be taken up by any man, without incurring the charge of singularity, or

exposing himself to the risk of persecution for righteousness' sake. The place where she dwelt was altogether different. It was a place of the greatest wickedness, where no virtuous principle could be practised, and no doctrine according to godliness could be maintained, without meeting with opposition and discouragement on the part of a profligate, irreligious, and ungodly population. For it is emphatically described, as the place of Satan's seat—the place of Satan's throne. But observe, moreover, that she was not only unfavourably situated as to the place where her lot had been cast, but she had much to suffer from the spirit of the times in which she lived. She was not only dwelling where the throne of Satan was, but she had fallen upon evil days—days of open persecution in which Antipas Christ's faithful martyr had been slain in the midst of her.

These considerations are to be borne in mind, when we form an estimate of the character of the Church of Pergamos. They clearly prove that the profession which she made was not a mere nominal profession—that the principles she vindicated and maintained were not taken up by her as a matter of course, or because they had been the legacy of those who had gone before her, or because the force of public opinion was upon their side, or because there was the least probability of their ministering to her temporal advantage. The reverse of this was the fact; and when we consider that she could not profess her faith in the Divine Redeemer, or hold fast his name, without encountering the most formidable obstacles, exposing herself to the loss of all her substance, and putting the lives of her members in jeopardy, the

conclusion is unavoidable, that she was actuated in her religious profession by the soundest principle, and that the doctrines she vindicated and upheld were espoused by her, not through any motive of worldly expediency, but simply because she believed them to be at once necessary for salvation, and accordant with the standards of eternal truth.

Thus far it was well with the Church of Pergamos, yet she had by no means attained to a state of unmingled purity, nor did she altogether escape from the words of admonition and rebuke. For though she held fast the name of the great Redeemer, and did not deny his faith, she was, nevertheless, actuated by a spirit of false charity in regard to the opinions and the practices of men who were animated by different views, and who were giving themselves to the propagation of false doctrines. And her guilt in this respect was aggravated by the consideration, that the men she was thus looking upon with a feeling of complacency or indifference, were not in the rank of private Christians whose influence might be exceedingly limited; but were assuming to themselves the character of teachers, and thereby attempting to exercise a powerful and extensive influence over the minds of other men.

Who these false teachers were, is distinctly intimated in the message to the Church of Pergamos. They were men holding the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumbling-block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. But in order to understand the bearing of these allusions, it is necessary to observe, that Balac was the king of Moab, and an idolater, and that Balaam was a professed

prophet of the living and the true God whom he sent messengers to consult in a season of great difficulty and distress. Besides the attainments of Balaam in respect of the gift of prophecy were by no means inconsiderable. He uttered, and that on several occasions, the most important predictions, in regard to the coming of the great Messiah, the prospects of the Israel of God, and the utter destruction of their enemies. Nay, he seems sometimes to have spoken in such a manner as might almost justify the conclusion, that he was actuated by the influence of religious principle, and that his heart was right in the sight of God. What, for example, more pious than the prayer :—" Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his !" What more magnanimous than the resolution :—" If Balac would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the commandment of the Lord, to do either good or bad of mine own mind, but what the Lord saith, that will I speak !" What more elevated than the expectation :—" I shall see him, but not now, I shall behold him, but not nigh : there shall come a star out of Jacob, and a sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth !" Yet notwithstanding of all this, he entered into the closest fellowship with an open and avowed idolater, whose acknowledged design was to induce him to pronounce curses upon the chosen and peculiar people of God. And though he did not consent to the plans of Balac all at once, and had even the appearance of resisting them, and declared moreover that he would take heed to speak only what the Lord should put into his mouth, yet after all he did

not act according to the messages he delivered. On the contrary, he still joined himself to the company of the very men who were combining together against the interests of God's people, and co-operated with them in their unhallowed designs, and officiated at their altars, and offered up their very sacrifices. And that being the fact, it gave the clearest of all demonstrations, that the messages which he faithfully delivered with his lips, had no firm and permanent hold on his heart—that he was as much devoted to the service of an irreligious and idolatrous king as to the service of the living and everlasting God—that for the wages of iniquity he would have cursed the children of Israel if he could—and that though he spake well with his lips, his heart all the while was going after his covetousness. Hence, instead of maintaining the integrity of his own character, and recommending the religion he professed to the man who had sent to ask counsel at his hands, he took the most effectual of all methods to confirm him in the errors and delusions in which he had been brought up, and was thus the most efficient instrument, by his personal example and his compromising spirit, in teaching Balac to cast a stumbling-block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. And not only so, but he sought to accomplish indirectly, and by a most crooked policy, what he had not the hardihood to attempt by the utterance of a positive and explicit curse. For it was by means of his counsel and instigation that the idolaters of the land were induced to invite the children of Israel to the sacrifices of their gods,—an invitation with which, we find, they were

tempted to comply, for they did eat, and bowed down to their idols, and committed whoredom with the daughters of Midian and of Moab, which had the effect of subjecting them to the vengeance of the Divine judgments, and thus operating as decidedly against their interests, as if a direct curse had been pronounced against them. And the result was, in so far as Balaam was concerned, that instead of dying the death of the righteous, and amongst the people of God, he fell by the sword, and went down to the pit in the midst of the uncircumcised; and his character is summed up in the language of the New Testament, when he is held forth as a man who had forsaken the right way, and ran greedily after error for reward, having his heart exercised with covetous practices, and loving the wages of unrighteousness.

Such was the character of Balaam, and such also was the character of the false teachers in the Church of Pergamos. Their policy seems to have been to inculcate such doctrines as were suited to the corruption of human nature, and likely to contribute to their own worldly advantage, thereby making a compromise between the service of dumb idols and the worship of the living and true God, and without requiring their followers to abandon altogether the distinctive principles of vital Christianity, yet tempting them to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. This compromise however of right principle—this blending of the elements of truth with the elements of falsehood, and that for the purpose either of escaping from persecution, or ministering to their own corruptions, was exceedingly offensive in the sight of the great Redeemer, and most injurious

to the purity and prosperity of the Church of Pergamos. And it was just because she tolerated these false teachers, instead of imitating the Church of Ephesus, and trying them and casting them out, that the solemn admonition was addressed to her :—"Repent, or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth."

But we turn from the warning recorded against the church at large to the promise specially addressed to the faithful. The promise is this :—"To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written which no man knoweth saving he which receiveth it."

In glancing at this promise the first thing which forces itself upon our observation is this, that there is about the privilege it confers, an air both of mystery and of secrecy. The manna is described as hidden, and the new name is engraven in characters which no man knoweth saving he which receiveth it. The reason probably is this. The Church of Pergamos was not only encompassed with the workers of iniquity, but even in the church itself there was great corruption, insomuch that those who held fast their integrity were mixed up with men who followed the practices of the Nicolaitanes, and held the doctrine of Balaam who taught Balac to cast a stumbling-block before the children of Israel, and therefore the tares might be so interwoven with the wheat, and the believing so blended with the unbelieving, that the outward marks of discipleship might be in a great measure lost, and the external profession give no decisive token of the reality

of the vital principle. But God not only knoweth them that are his, but he can afford evidences to his own people, which though concealed from the observation of other men, and that more especially in times of general corruption, are yet capable of being recognized by themselves; and the greater the darkness and the disorder that are without, the sweeter for the most part, is the refreshment or the consolation which is enjoyed within, and by the few unto whom the secret of the Lord is revealed. And such, we presume, is the reason of the peculiarity in the promise addressed to the Church of Pergamos.

But it may be necessary to explain the terms of the promise itself. First, then, with regard to the hidden manna. Manna was the substance which God rained from heaven for the nourishment of the children of Israel in the wilderness, though they themselves when they first saw it, wist not what it was. This they were not only permitted to gather day by day for the supply of their returning wants, but in compliance with a special command of Almighty God, Moses said unto Aaron:—"Take a pot, and put an omer full of manna therein, and lay it up before the Lord, to be kept for your generations, that they may see the bread wherewith I have fed you in the wilderness, when I brought you forth from the land of Egypt. And as the Lord commanded Moses, so Aaron laid it up before the Testimony to be kept." This, we conceive, affords an explanation of the expression in the promise. The manna which Aaron laid up was hidden manna. It was not exposed to the observation of the children of Israel. It was deposited in the Ark of the Covenant, and that Ark was lodged in the most holy

place. Hence, when God promises to give to him that overcometh to eat of the hidden manna, we understand not only that his soul is to be nourished with that spiritual provision which cometh down from heaven—that bread of life of which if a man eat he shall never hunger, but that he is to partake secretly, or in a way that the world knoweth not, of the richest of all the heavenly blessings which are treasured up in that great Redeemer in whom dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily ; that furnished even now with the foretastes of the coming glory, and partaking in the wilderness of angel's food, he may be cheered amid the difficulties of the way, and so strengthened with all might by the Spirit in the inner man, as to go forward without interruption and without fainting, till he comes at last to that better land, where he shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, for the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed him, and shall lead him unto living fountains of waters, and God shall wipe away all tears from his eyes.

Then with regard to the white stone—This, we presume, has reference to certain customs, the origin of which it is difficult to discover, but which are of very ancient date. We learn from the writings of Pliny that it was the practice of the Scythians every night before retiring to rest, to deposit in an urn kept for that purpose, either a white or a black pebble—black, when the day happened to be one of sadness or disappointment, but white, when it was one of prosperity and joy. By many this custom was carefully observed during the greater part of their lives ; and at their deaths it was by emptying the urns, separating the white stones from

the black, and counting them over, that the surviving relatives formed their judgment of the happiness or misery of their past lives. And this practice was probably adopted, for the purpose of impressing upon their own minds the chequered nature of all sublunary enjoyments, moderating their lamentations for the removal of beloved friends, by tracing out the sorrows which have embittered their earthly lot, and drawing it may be from the tenor of their experience in the present life, what they might be disposed to consider as a presage of their destiny in the world of disembodied spirits.

This also was in all probability the origin of a custom somewhat similar which prevailed among the Romans—the custom of marking in their calendar, what they regarded as lucky days with white, while the opposite were marked with black.

But the custom which seems to throw greatest light on the promise to the Church of Pergamos is one which existed anciently among the Greeks, and which seems also, with some modifications, to have been introduced among other nations of antiquity. When a person was charged with crime against the state, and was in consequence brought to trial, it was usual to take the verdict of the citizens who sat in judgment upon him by ballot; and when the sentence was one of acquittal, the stones which they cast into the urn, and by which their judgment was declared were white, whereas, on the other hand, when the sentence was one of condemnation, the stones were black.

*Mos erat antiquis niveis atrisque lapillis
His damnare reos, illis absolvere culpâ.*

OID. METAM.

Traces of a similar custom are to be found amongst ourselves at the present day. There are, for example, various societies which regulate the admission of new members by ballot, in which case it is the practice to take the votes in favour of admission by a white marble or white stone, while the votes for rejection are given by means of a black marble or black stone. Hence the white stone in the promise we regard as the token, not of condemnation or rejection on the part of the Divine Redeemer, but of acquittal and acceptance. In other words, it just expresses what is embodied in the declaration of an apostle :—"There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus,—for the law of the spirit of life, hath made them free from the law of sin and of death."

And, finally, what connexion is there between the new name and the white stone? This also may be explained by the custom to which we have already referred. In the case of an individual on trial, when the verdict is given in his favour by means of the white stone, he virtually obtains a new name. He loses the designation of a criminal, and the innocence which is emphatically expressed by the white stone, is inscribed as it were on his own character. Or in the case of a candidate for admission to a particular society, when the votes are taken, and the white stones are declared in his favour, he not only becomes a member of that society, and is entitled to all its privileges, but he is warranted to make use of the designation by which the society is distinguished. By the act of admission he receives a new name, and that name is as closely connected with the

fidelity, while on the part of others there was the manifestation of licentiousness and idolatry the most glaring and intolerable. Like the two baskets of figs which were set before the temple of the Lord, and seen in the vision of the prophet Jeremiah, the one having very good figs, even like the figs that are first ripe, but the other having evil figs, so very evil that they could not be eaten, so it was with the members of the Church at Thyatira. In their case there was the meeting of opposite extremes, the shining of the clearest light in the midst of the greatest darkness, the flourishing of the most vital Christianity in the very hot-bed of the rankest corruption. Such a state of things is not uncommon. There is frequently the greatest display of the energy and decision of the Christian character, not where God's people are moving amid the decencies and formalities of a mere nominal Christianity, and where every outward observance wears the semblance at least of what is right, but where they are encompassed on every side with that monstrous and intolerable wickedness, with which they can have no fellowship, and from which their righteous souls instinctively revolt. Nevertheless, it was to that church, or to the faithful belonging to it, that the Divine Redeemer promised, what in the circumstances is very remarkable, not the crown of life, or the white stone, or the hidden manna, or the new name, but the morning star, which seems to be the prelude of brighter and of better days, with power and authority over the nations, the same kind of power which Christ himself had received of his Father, which we presume to be a spiritual kind of power,—the power whereby they

were either to be made willing to submit to the principles of his righteous government, or were themselves to be as entirely divested of all power to resist them, and as completely shattered and destroyed as are the vessels of a potter when they are broken to shivers. In other words, the prosperity, not merely of one solitary church, but the firm establishment of the cause of the Divine Redeemer, and the wide diffusion of the principles of Christianity over the nations—nations that were dwelling in the habitations of darkness and of horrid cruelty, were hinging, in the first instance, not on the putting forth of any power on the part of the kingdoms of this world, but on the fidelity, the abjuration of idolatry, and the sterling Protestant principle of one Christian community in holding fast that which they had already received, and in keeping the works of Christ unto the end. That was the main thing which was required of them; and how momentous was the position which they held—how solemn the responsibility which was placed in their hands! Not only the flourishing of vital Christianity in their own hearts, and in the bosom of the church to which they belonged, and in their own day, was dependent on their faithfulness; but the morning star—the ushering in of brighter days for the generation that was to come after them was placed within the reach of their instrumentality, while they had it in their power to claim the heathen for their inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for their possession. It was a vast sovereignty that was placed at the disposal of the faithful in the Church of Thyatira—a sovereignty with which the crowns, the thrones, and the kingdoms of this world are

not worthy to be compared—the very sovereignty for the sake of which Christ saw of the travail of his soul and was satisfied. It was a sovereignty, however, on which it is to be feared the Church of Thyatira never entered. The stupendous boon which was held out by the munificence of the Divine Redeemer, appears to have been forfeited by her own faithlessness, and the result has been, that she herself has been overtaken by the righteous judgments of heaven. The light which she once emitted was a brilliant light, but it was the light, not of a morning star ushering in the glory and the splendour of a perfect day, but of an evening star which has gone down from the heavens, and been succeeded by the darkness of an everlasting night. Every vestige of that ancient church has been completely demolished. Even the place where it stood is now unknown. The morning star has been supplanted by the crescent which now shines from the mosques of her oppressors. And, instead of rising to the promised sovereignty over the nations, she herself has been ruled with a rod of iron, and like the vessels of a potter, she has been broken to shivers.

Therefore we learn this important lesson from the history of Thyatira, that faithfulness on the part of a Christian church, and that more especially in times of great corruption and idolatry, though it may not exempt her from the violence of persecution, is most likely to invest her with great power over the nations, while it prepares the way for brighter and for better days; whereas, on the other hand, if there be a departure from sound Protestant principle, and a want of firmness in adhering to the works of Christ unto the end, there is

the strongest of all probabilities, that this temporising spirit will not only divest her of her efficiency as an instrument of good in the hands of the Divine Redeemer, but bring down upon her in the end the very destruction it was expected to avert.

That such should be the case amongst ourselves may seem to some to be an event of all others the least likely to be realised. Yet, if God deal with us, as he did with the Church of Thyatira, it is, we think, the very result we have the greatest reason to dread. Ours has been the character of a Protestant country, and a Protestant Church. To this mainly we have been indebted for the right of private judgment in regard to matters of religion, for the training of a sound scriptural education, for access at all times and amid all trials to the precious oracles of eternal truth, and for the opportunity of sitting, every man under his own vine, and his own fig-tree, worshipping God according to the dictates of his conscience, having none to make him afraid. And had we used our privileges aright, our power over the nations might have been impregnable, our civil rights and our religious liberties had been established on a foundation too strong to be overturned, and the morning star which had more than dawned upon the land, might have passed into the splendour of a bright and unclouded day. But, like the Church of Thyatira, we have been unfaithful in respect of the important trust committed into our hands. For, instead of maintaining our position on the ground of Protestant principle, and guarding with the utmost jealousy the privileges which were purchased with the blood of our ancestors, we have entered into forbidden alliances,

and by giving countenance and encouragement to the grossest delusions, we have not only compromised our own integrity, but exposed the most valued of our privileges to the peril of utter destruction.

Indeed, it must be obvious to every man who knows any thing of what is going on at the present time, that the principles by which the pure light of the gospel would be again extinguished, and our religious liberties trampled under foot, are now working in the bosom of our land, just as vigorously, though not perhaps precisely in the same way, as they ever did in the darkest and the bloodiest periods of our history. Popery itself, the great Antichrist of the Bible, the Mother of abominations, who in times past has made herself drunk with the blood of the saints, is recovering apparently from her deadly wound, re-asserting her ancient claims, and regaining her wonted ascendancy. Some of the mightiest bulwarks reared by the enlightened piety of our ancestors in defence of the Protestantism of our country have already been broken down and destroyed. The superstitions of Rome under various disguises are now insinuating themselves into the very heart of our ancient and most valued institutions. The righteous antipathy which was once felt in our land against that system of falsehood and delusion is either rapidly disappearing, or if existing at all, it is branded as the offspring only of bigotry and of prejudice. Vast multitudes even professing attachment to the churches of the Reformation, if not abettors of its worst corruptions, are inclined to consider it as a matter of the most trifling concern though Papal superstition should be permitted henceforth to triumph and prevail.

And because of these things there is some reason to fear, that the foundations of our national greatness are already undermined, and that Ichabod ere long will be inscribed on all the glory of our land.

But it has been said that Popery is changed. This in some respects is true. It is different now from what it was anterior to the Reformation ; and it is everlastingly changing. It is different in Scotland from what it is in Ireland. It is different in England from what it is at Rome. For it has the power of accommodating itself to all circumstances, of insinuating itself into all systems, and adapting itself to all forms of government. Fall down before it, and give to it the countenance which it seeks, and speak of it in the language of flattery and praise, and it will fawn upon you as with the gentleness of a lamb : but resist it, and lift up a decisive testimony against it, and denounce it in terms which the Bible warrants and supplies, and it will pierce you as with the fangs of a serpent, and rend you as with the fury of a lion. Sometimes it works with violence, making bare the arm of a stern and unrelenting persecution, but in that case only when its power is strong, and irresistible, and triumphant : and at other times it works with guile, breathing the spirit of the utmost meekness, and proclaiming with softest accents the message of peace, peace, when there is no peace. In these respects it may be said, and said truly, that Popery is changed ; and the changes are as diversified and as numberless as the fluctuations of human society can demand, or the devices of human corruption can suggest. But with regard to all the essential or fundamental principles which enter into the constitution

of that apostate church, there is no change, not the shadow of a change, nor is there the possibility of a change, without the renunciation of its own claims to infallibility, which were almost equivalent to its complete and eternal extinction. It may clothe itself in a different garb, and seek the accomplishment of its purposes by the agency of other means, and present itself to mankind in an aspect that is somewhat new ; and because it does so, it may seem, to a superficial observer, to be altogether changed. But its vital principles are still the same ; and these are principles which, while despotic as ever in their tyranny over the consciences of men, and equally ruinous to the interests of immortal souls, are as destructive of all social order, and as much imbued with the spirit of intolerance as they were in the days that are gone by. The state of Ireland at the present time is a proof of this ; and it is scarce possible to advert to the tremendous curses which are denounced from her altars, or to trace their legitimate results in deeds of violence and of bloodshed, perpetrated not unfrequently in the face of open day, and with impunity, without gathering enough to convince us that the sword of persecution has not yet returned to its scabbard, and that in the bosom of that corrupt and ambitious church there is, even in our day, a thirsting that is not yet slaked for the blood of saints.

These, in conjunction with other causes and elements of evil which are working busily around us, we cannot contemplate with any other than a feeling of anxiety and alarm. A dark and portentous cloud appears to be impending over the Protestantism of our country, which

neither our prayers nor our late repentance may be able to dissipate—a cloud which is most likely to come down upon our heads in showers of desolating judgment. Even the revivals which God has been pleased to vouchsafe in many districts of our land, so far from furnishing the certain index of outward peace and prosperity to the church, and thereby removing all feelings of apprehension from the mind, may rather be regarded as a means of preparation for seasons of severe and protracted trial. And when we look around us, and behold men on every hand betaking themselves to their watch-towers—prayers ascending from quarters where prayer was never wont to be heard—and multitudes of quickened souls joining themselves to the church which Christ has purchased with his blood, we cannot help thinking, that God, at this time, and in a remarkable manner, may be raising up witnesses, as in former days, to bear testimony to the truth when outward troubles are abounding, and the love of many is waxing cold. At all events, it is right for every man, having reference to the signs of the present times, to look well to the foundations on which his religious opinions are resting, and to prepare himself by the exercise of his Christian graces the cultivation of a spirit of close fellowship with God, and a diligent study of the lives and principles of the martyrs, for whatsoever services may be required of him, whether in the way of duty, or of suffering, amid the days of trouble, and blasphemy, and rebuke which the Word of God prepares us to expect, and which seem, from the present aspect of events, to be drawing nigh, nay, even at the very door.

CHAPTER VIII.



THE CHURCH OF SARDIS.

THE Church of Sardis was not charged with any grievous departure from the truth, nor with the toleration of any false doctrine, nor with the guilt of any glaring corruption. Her creed, her standards, her constitution as a church might be altogether unexceptionable, and in so far as the outward forms of religious worship were concerned, there might not perhaps be much that was deserving of blame. But then hers was a mere nominal profession. She had the reputation of being religious, but her religion was a matter of mere form, and not of vital principle. And therefore in the judgment of the great Redeemer, who looketh not only to the outward appearance, but who searcheth the heart, she is described as being dead, spiri-

tually dead, dead in trespasses and sins. The vital principle was wanting. There were no symptoms of the new birth, no genuine faith, no devout affections, no heavenly desires, no secret devotion, no close fellowship with the living God. There was nothing but the bare forms of religion, the bodily service which profiteth little, while the living principles which it is the office of the Holy Spirit to produce, and without which there can be no acceptable obedience, were utterly extinct. "I know thy works that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead."

It was not always thus with the Church of Sardis. In times past, as appears from the counsel addressed to her, she had not only heard the truth as it is in Jesus, but she seems to have received it in the love of it. Connected with her communion there were those at one time who had not only the name to live, but the reality, and the vital principle. These, however, with a few exceptions, appear to have been removed to another world, and a spirit of deadness and formality seems to have crept over the remnant that was left. This is not unfrequently the case, in places which have been long favoured with distinguished privileges, where the light of Divine truth has been shining with the greatest clearness, and the gospel of the grace of God has been preached through the course of many generations in simplicity, and purity, and power. The minds of men in such circumstances are exceedingly apt to become familiarised with the most solemn and momentous of all truths, and instead of hearing them with a spirit of the liveliest interest, and receiving them with full purpose of heart, and submitting themselves to

their practical influence, and rejoicing in them as all their salvation and all their desire, they are in danger of settling down into a state of listless formality, regarding them as matters of ordinary concern, and realising what was spoken to the Prophet Ezekiel in regard to the children of Israel :—"Also, thou son of man, the children of thy people still are talking against thee by the walls, and in the doors of the houses, and they speak one to another, every one to his brother, saying, come, I pray you, and hear what is the word that cometh forth from the Lord ; and they come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them : for with their mouth they shew much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness. And, lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument, for they hear thy words, but they do them not."

Thus it was with the Church of Sardis, so that the thing which she chiefly needed was a revival of the work of God's Holy Spirit in the midst of her. And to that she was exhorted :—Remember how thou hast received, and heard, and hold fast, and repent, and be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain that are ready to die. Yet considering the state of deadness and formality into which she had fallen, it might almost have been concluded, that such a revival was hopeless, and that the few faithful ones who had not defiled their garments would have been commanded to separate themselves entirely from her communion, lest, by touching the unclean thing, and coming into contact with what

was actually dead, they should be contaminated with her corruptions, and eventually overtaken with her plagues. But this was not the mode of procedure recommended by the great Redeemer who walketh in the midst of the golden candlesticks, and who holdeth the stars in his right hand. Though perfectly aware of her formality and her lifelessness, he nevertheless called on the faithful who belonged to her, not indeed to withdraw from her communion, but to remain at their posts watching, and holding fast, and strengthening the things that were ready to die. That, no doubt, would be a difficult task, exceedingly trying to their Christian principles, and demanding the exercise of the most heroic faith. But it was a duty, which, however formidable, they were not at liberty to neglect, while by giving themselves to its faithful performance they must have occupied the very position which of all others was the most favourable, not only for lifting up a signal testimony for the truth, but for advancing the cause of the Divine Redeemer in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation. And, though they might not be able by their personal holiness, or by the efforts of the most strenuous zeal, either to bring about a complete revival of the principles of vital Christianity in the church with which they were connected, or altogether to ward off from her the awful judgment to which she had rendered herself obnoxious by her sins, yet neither their labour of love, nor their patience of tribulation was to go for nought. Even at the worst, it is more than probable, that they might be instrumental in the correction of some evil, or in the restraining of some corruption,

or in the accomplishment of some good. But at all events an ample recompence of reward was provided for themselves. For it was promised, first of all, that they should be clothed in white raiment, which seems to have reference to the dress worn in ancient times upon occasions of marriage, or at important festivals, or during seasons of great rejoicing, or upon the gaining of signal victories, or in solemn and magnificent processions, and which may therefore be regarded as at once expressive of purity, of triumph, and felicity. In other words, being stript of their own vile garments, which are nothing better than filthy rags, and clothed in the righteousness which Christ himself has provided, they shall be brought into a state of acceptance and of holiness, and be presented faultless before the presence of his glory, even with exceeding joy. Accordingly it is declared, "and they shall walk with me," that is with Christ, "in white," which indicates the greatest harmony, and the closest fellowship, for how can two walk together except they be agreed? And the reason is assigned, "for they are worthy,"—worthy, not by reason of any merit of their own, but because of the righteousness of Christ imputed to them, and received by faith, so that Christ himself is made to them wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and complete redemption. And it is added, we presume, in allusion to the public registers in which the names of the children of Israel were enrolled under their respective tribes, but from which they were erased when they died ;—"And I will not blot out their name out of the book of life, but I will confess their name before my Father, and before his angels ;" which is equi-

valent to the conferring upon them of the highest honour and dignity, while at the same time they are invested with the energies of an endless life, and clothed in the raiment of immortality.

But while such was the promised destiny of a few faithful disciples who had not defiled their garments, a very different fate was reserved for the Church of Sardis in general. She, indeed, appears to have been satisfying herself with a name to live, while she was dead. She was therefore not only in a dangerous condition, but because of her deadness, she was in the very state in which she was most likely to be indifferent to her own spiritual interests, or else to be entertaining herself with the delusion that no serious evil was about to overtake her. In this, however, she was greatly mistaken. Her carnal security, and the soundness of her slumber, how congenial soever they might be with her own corruptions, could afford her no immunity from the righteous judgments of heaven. And there is this peculiarity in the awful threatening pronounced against her, that there was to be no palpable premonition of the approaching judgment. It was to come upon her by surprise, at the very time she was sleeping in a state of carnal security, as with the noiseless step of a thief stealing upon her unawares, amid the dead and the darkness of the night, or at an hour when she herself was dreading no evil. And thus the very judgment which was to open her eyes on the reality of her danger, was at the same moment to launch her into sudden and irreparable perdition.

Thus it was with Sardis. Notwithstanding of the solemn message that was sent to her, she seems to have

slumbered on in a state of deadness and insensibility, foregoing the spirit of watchfulness and of prayer, and neglecting to strengthen the things that were ready to die. But her deadness was the worst symptom of her disease—the soundness of her slumber the most appalling index of her lethargy—her undisturbed repose, her freedom from all alarm, and her carnal security, the infallible sign that the measure of her iniquity was fast filling up, and that Christ was upon the very eve of coming upon her, even like a thief in the night, or at an hour when she herself did not expect him. And the terrific threatening seems literally to have been carried into accomplishment. For, as we learn from competent authority, the whole city was swallowed up by a devouring earthquake ! Even the few names that had not defiled their garments, though registered in the book of life, and incapable of being blotted out there, had no power to save the church or the city to which they belonged from being blotted from the face of the earth, as if they were cursing the very ground by their deadness and sterility ; and the same fearful visitation that broke in upon the soundness of their repose, sent them down in a moment into the yawning gulf, and became the swift and stern executioner of their doom.

Hence it has been emphatically remarked by one :—
“ The state of Sardis now is a token that the warning was given in vain ; and shows that the threatenings of the Lord, when disregarded, become certain judgments. As the seat of a Christian church, it has lost—all it had to lose—the name. No Christians reside on the spot.”—(*Keith.*)

It has been remarked by another :—“ Reached Sardis,

the great capital of the Lydian kings, and the city of the far-famed Croesus. Found difficulty in procuring a lodging, at length put up in a miserable mud hut occupied by a Turk.—Could not refrain from weeping while we sung the seventy-fourth Psalm, and prayed among the ruins of Sardis. Here were once a few names, which had not defiled their garments, and they are now walking with the Redeemer in white. But alas, the church as a body had only a name to live while they were in reality dead ; and they did not hear the voice of merciful admonition, and did not strengthen the things which were ready to die. Wherefore the candlestick has been removed out of its place.—Our eye has affected our hearts, while we beheld around us the ruins of this once splendid city, with nothing now to be seen but a few mud huts, inhabited by ignorant Turks.—Everything seems as if God had cursed the place, and left it to the dominion of Satan.”—(*Fisk.*)

These are the remarks of another :—“ The rough hill of the Acropolis of Sardis, with the inconsiderable and rapidly disappearing ruins on its ridge, was now before us ; and we saw beyond it, looking to the east, the lofty irregular summits of Mount Tmolus, covered with deep snow. On the sixth hour of our journey we reached the desolate city. This, in the time of its greatness and prosperity, was the very hour at which its streets and public places would be crowded, and when the voice of public or of private affairs resounded through the busy town. We saw not a living creature. This contrast, though trite enough as a feature of composition or rhetoric, is still awfully impressive, when presenting itself, as it must, in spots like these. I entered a deep

narrow glen that separated the Acropolis of Sardis from the adjacent mountains. A scramble over a very irregular path brought me in a few minutes to the opposite end of the Acropolis, and in sight of the columns of the celebrated temple of Cybele, situated on a pleasant little green plain about a furlong to the south of the impending hill. I repaired with eager haste to these columns, and sat myself down in a melancholy mood on the green sward opposite to them. Here, indeed, the work of Turkish destruction had advanced gradually, but too rapidly. In 1700, Chishull had observed six lofty Ionic columns, all entire, except that the capital of one was distorted by an earthquake, and many other remains were adjoining to them. In 1750, Peyssonnel found standing, three columns with their architraves, a part of the cella, and three detached columns. At the time of Chandler's visit in 1765, there were five columns erect, and even then the amiable traveller, in tearing himself from the spot, made the melancholy observation that 'it is impossible to behold, without deep regret, this imperfect remnant of so beautiful and glorious an edifice.' In 1812, Mr. Cockerell found three standing columns, the truncated portions of four others, and a part of the wall of the cella. At the beginning of April 1828, only two columns, one of them with the distorted capital as described by Chishull, and a piece of the shaft of another, with its beautiful but broken capital sunk in a hole in the earth, met my eye. Of the wall of the cella, I could scarcely see a trace. This was all that remained of the magnificent temple which had received the homage of remote and ingenious ages as one of the most magnificent

works of Greek art, and whose melancholy ruins had been honoured with the regret and reverential admiration of travellers from distant lands, and in a special manner by my own enlightened countrymen. I indulged a sad but pleasing reverie in recalling the feelings and imaginings of men, who, pilgrims like myself, had visited this remote waste, and this long deserted shrine. I called them before me, the distant, the unknown, and the long since dead, and associated them with the forlorn pillars—the sepulchral mementoes of prostrate beauty and glory.”

—(*Macfarlane.*)

And it has been strikingly observed by another still :—

“ If I should be asked what impresses the mind most strongly on beholding Sardis, I should say the indescribable solitude, like the darkness of Egypt,—darkness that could be felt. So the deep solitude of the spot, once the ‘ Lady of Kingdoms,’ produces a corresponding feeling of desolate abandonment in the mind which can never be forgotten. Connect this feeling with the message of the Apocalypse to the Church of Sardis :—‘ I know thy works that thou hast a name that thou livest and art dead,’ and then look around, and ask, where are the churches, where are the Christians of Sardis ? The tumuli beyond the Hermus reply, ‘ all dead,’ suffering the infliction of the threatened judgment of God for the abuse of their privileges. Let the unbeliever then be asked,—Is there no truth in prophecy—no reality in religion ?”

(*Arundell.*)

These certainly are striking extracts, and the lesson which they tend most forcibly to impress on the mind is this :—That a mere formal profession of religion, while it

blinds the mind to the perception of its danger, and induces a spirit of carelessness and unconcern, exposes it at the same time to sudden and irreparable ruin. Yet that is the condition of many who make a fair profession of religion. They know well what the gospel is. They have listened to it till their ears have become perfectly familiar with the sound, and perhaps they are able to speak with the utmost fluency on every doctrine connected with the truth as it is in Jesus. But it is one thing to know the truth as a matter of mere speculation, and another thing to be practically and experimentally alive to its sanctifying and its life-giving power: one thing to be brought into a state of tranquillity and repose, because the truth has made us free from the bondage of condemnation and of sin, and another thing to be putting ourselves in the attitude of defiance, and remaining at ease within the precincts of Sion, because we have been quenching the Spirit of all grace, and doing despite to the Holy One of Israel. The latter is a state which to the deceitfulness of the human mind may appear exceedingly agreeable, for what can be more soothing to the spirit amid the troubles and distractions of this evil world than a state of quiet and undisturbed repose. But alas, the misfortune is, that it has no solid foundation to rest upon. It is dependent for its very existence on the spirit of strong delusion. No reasonable being can rely upon it without enclosing himself in a refuge of lies. How sad the condition of such a soul! How fearful the hazard to which it is exposed! How awful to be purchasing a few moments of slumber, for what may be followed, and followed speedily, with the per-

dition of the soul for ever ! To the man in such a state we would solemnly appeal, saying to him with all earnestness :—Is there nothing in the dying agonies of the Divine Redeemer on whose blood you are trampling, or in the warnings of the Holy Spirit whose strivings you are resisting, that has the power to disturb your security, or to awaken you from your slumbers ! And are you resolved, that in defiance of every remonstrance, you will continue to sleep on and to take your rest ! yet, remember that this cannot last for ever. Sooner or later there must be an awakening. There is no sleep in heaven : for there they rest not day and night singing before the throne, Holy, Holy, Holy, the heavens and the earth are full of thy glory ; nor is there any sleep in hell : for there the worm never dieth, and the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever. And is it befitting that with an eternity unprovided for, and all your sins uncanceled and unforgiven, you should be asleep here—asleep within view of the solemn mysteries of the cross of Christ—asleep on the mount which commands the prospect of the celestial land—asleep under the shadow of the tree whose leaves are given for the healing of the nations—asleep on the verge and amid the music of the river of which the saints have been drinking in all generations, and which maketh glad the city of our God above—asleep on the brink of the yawning grave, and on the very borders of hell !

Awake, awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light ! Behold now is the accepted time, behold now is the day of salvation ! For behold it is but a little while, and he that shall

come, will come, and will not tarry. Watch, therefore, for ye know not when the hour shall be, whether it shall be in the morning, or at noon, or in the evening, or amid the darkness of the night. Blessed are those servants who shall be found watching when the Bridegroom cometh!

CHAPTER IX.



THE CHURCH OF PHILADELPHIA.

To the Church of Philadelphia the great Redeemer made himself known as "he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth and no man shutteth, and shutteth and no man openeth;" and in that character he intimated, that he had set before her an open door which no man could shut, by which we understand, that he had furnished her with opportunities of usefulness of which it was impossible for her adversaries to deprive her. Every attempt, indeed, might be made for that purpose, and when we think that she was not only encompassed with the synagogue of Satan, but that she herself had but a little strength, it might have been argued, that the attempt would have been crowned with

complete success. Nevertheless, it is evident that he who was with her, and who had set before her the open door, was mightier than all that were against her ; and little and feeble as her strength might seem to be, she was enabled by his grace helping her to make the best use of her opportunities, and the result was, that she kept the word of Christ, and did not deny his name.

Accordingly we find that the message to the Church of Philadelphia was not only couched in terms of unqualified approval, but that she was favoured on the part of the Divine Redeemer with the special promise, that he would keep her from the hour of temptation, or of persecution, which was coming upon all the world to try them that dwell upon the earth.

This persecution, we presume, to be different from that which is adverted to in the address to the Church of Smyrna, in which it is said :—"Behold the Devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried, and ye shall have tribulation ten days"—a prediction which we consider as referring to the ten heathen persecutions which occurred during the first three centuries. To the Church of Philadelphia, however, it was not promised, that she should be kept from the tribulation of these ten days, for that would have exempted her from the violence of persecution altogether, which does not appear to have been the case. Her immunity from suffering, instead of lasting for ten days, was limited only to an hour, and an hour that was just coming, by which we understand, that those who were then living, and to whom the message was immediately addressed, were either to be delivered from some persecution that was near at hand, probably

the persecution of Trajan, or that if they did suffer from such a cause, they were to be saved at all events from the hour or the power of it.

Nor was this to be the only result of their faithfulness. Christ spoke also in these encouraging words:—"Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out : and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is New Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God, and I will write upon him my new name." The terms in this promise are somewhat peculiar, and may, we think, be explained by reference to certain customs which prevailed in ancient times amongst the Romans, and other nations of antiquity. The promise, it will be observed, is addressed to those who have been engaged in battle, and have come off victorious. Now the custom among the Romans to which we refer was this : it was the practice to erect pillars, sometimes of brass, sometimes of stone, sometimes of the finest marble in honour of great men, or in commemoration of illustrious actions, and of signal victories. These pillars were often of the most splendid description, ornamented with the finest sculpture, and having engraved upon them the name, the achievements, and the native city of the distinguished individuals for whom they were erected. It deserves also to be noticed in connexion with the same practice, that when any man had signalized himself by any remarkable exploit, it was customary to give him a new name having special reference to his own achievements, which name was also written on the pillar or monument raised to his memory, while the pillars

themselves were erected, either in temples, or in places of public resort, for the purpose of making known both to their contemporaries, and to the men of coming generations, the efforts of their patriotism, or the glory of their illustrious exploits.

Hence the allusion in the promise to the Church of Philadelphia :—" Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God ;" in other words, he shall be a monument of the Divine power, and faithfulness, and mercy, even amid the glories of the celestial temple. " And he shall go no more out ;" that is, he shall remain there for ever, free from the possibility of change, and under the necessity of girding himself with armour, and going out to the field of conflict no more for ever. " And I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is New Jerusalem," the Church of Christ, " which cometh down out of heaven from my God, and I will write upon him my new name ;" in other words, the evidences of his Christian character, his lot and portion in the church of the living God, his exertions in the cause of the Divine Redeemer, and his right and title to the new name by which the saints shall be known and recognized in heaven, shall all be so fully disclosed, as to make it evident to the powers and principalities of the celestial world, that he, and such as he are truly the purchase of the Redeemer's blood, the trophies of the Redeemer's victories, and the very pillars of that glorious temple, of which Christ himself is the foundation, and the head of the corner.

But let us see whether in the present condition of

Philadelphia there be any traces of the divine faithfulness in the fulfilment of these remarkable promises. On this point, as we have done in regard to the other churches, we shall quote the testimony of a few competent authorities.

It is observed by one :—"In eight hours, we passed from Sardis to Philadelphia, now called Allah-Scheyr, that is, the city of God. There are five churches in the town, besides twenty which are either old or small, and not now used. The number of houses about three thousand, Greek and Turkish."—(*Fisk.*)

It is said by another :—"The city suffered much from earthquakes, yet was remarkable for the number of its Christian population, even subsequently to the Turkish invasion. This feature has not altogether passed away. The purity of the apostolic doctrine may be degraded, but its form at least is retained by the Greeks, who have twenty-five places of regular worship."—(*Croly.*)

It is remarked by another :—"It is an interesting circumstance to find Christianity more flourishing here than in many other parts of the Turkish empire. There is still a numerous Christian population : they occupy three hundred houses. Divine service is performed every Sunday in five churches. The circumstance also that Philadelphia is now called Allah-Scheyr, the city of God, when viewed in connection with the promises made to that church, and especially with that of writing the name of the city of God upon its faithful members, is, to say the least, a singular concurrence."—(*Hartley.*)

"Nor is it less interesting in these eventful times, and notwithstanding the general degeneracy of the Greek

Church to learn that the present Bishop of Philadelphia accounts the 'Bible the only foundation of all religious belief,' and that he admits that 'abuses have entered into the church which former ages might endure ; but the present must put them down.'"—(*Keith.*)

"Arundell concurs with other travellers in describing the streets of the city as filthy, and the houses remarkably mean. But he was greatly impressed with the beauty of the country as seen from the hills, observing that the view from these elevated situations is magnificent in the extreme : gardens and vineyards lie at the back and sides of the town, and before it is one of the most extensive and richest plains in Asia. There are no considerable ruins. One of the most remarkable is a single column of great antiquity, and which had evidently appertained to another structure than the present church ; which taken with the present name of the town forcibly brings to mind that part of the message to the Church of Philadelphia : —' Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out.'"—(*Pictorial Bible.*)

Here then we have the church which stood illustrious, if not pre-eminent among the Churches of Asia, for her fidelity in adhering to the truth as it is in Jesus, and contending earnestly, and in times of persecution, for the faith once delivered to the saints. And while the message which was addressed to her was entirely free from the language both of condemnation and reproof, Christ specially promised, not only that he would keep her from the hour of temptation that was coming upon all the world, but that he would make them even of the syna-

gogue of Satan to come and worship before her feet, and to know that he had loved her. And it is a remarkable fact, that Philadelphia has not only suffered less from the oppression of her enemies than any of the Churches of Asia, and been enabled to maintain her ground with greater vigour against the inroads of every false system of religion, but that "there has been a succession of Christians there in every generation downwards to the present time,"—(*Scott*,)—while "the church in comparison with those around is in a remarkably thriving and prosperous condition."—(*Latrobe*.)

There is something also very striking in the fact that the designation which it now bears, and which seems to have been given to it by the followers of a false religion, is analogous to the very inscription which Christ promised to write on its faithful members, as on the pillars of a temple: for it is now called Allah-Scheyr, the city of God. And while it is not to be doubted that the promises to that church have met with their fullest accomplishment amid the glories of another and a loftier world, it is yet exceedingly interesting to observe the solemn memorials of the Redeemer's faithfulness still remaining amid the very scenery that was familiar to the members of this illustrious church in the days of old—memorials, too of a character so striking, that infidelity, from the very synagogue of Satan, has bowed down before them, and borne testimony to their existence, and their singularity. For these are the words of the celebrated Gibbon, a man not less distinguished for his profound accomplishments as a historian, than for his insidious and infidel attacks against the principles of vital Christianity. "The

desolation of Ephesus is complete, and the temple of Diana and the Church of Mary will equally elude the search of the curious traveller. The circus and three stately theatres of Laodicea are now peopled with wolves and foxes. Sardis is reduced to a miserable village. The God of Mahommed without a rival is invoked in the mosques of Thyatira and Pergamos; and the populousness of Smyrna is supported by the foreign trade of the Franks and Armenians. Philadelphia alone has been saved by prophecy or courage." And he adds, as if in allusion to the pillars of the celestial temple that were never to go out—that were to stand as monuments of the divine faithfulness for ever:—"Among the Greek colonies and churches of Asia, Philadelphia is still erect—a column in a scene of ruins!"

The great lesson which we learn from the past history and the present condition of Philadelphia is the importance of diligence and fidelity in the improvement of the religious privileges which God has placed within our reach. The talents indeed which he has entrusted to our charge may not be of a higher character than those which fall to the lot of the great majority of mankind, and as it was with the Church of Philadelphia, we may be invested only with a little strength. But talents even the most limited are given for the purpose of being improved; and wherever there is a principle of faithfulness, the open door will not be wanting—the opportunities of usefulness will be at hand. And if these opportunities are diligently improved, according to the measure of our endowments, and with a single eye to the Divine glory, then, in that case, we are taking the most effectual of all

methods, both for adding to the number and value of our own religious attainments, and for forwarding the cause of the Divine Redeemer, amid the corruptions of a world that lieth in wickedness.

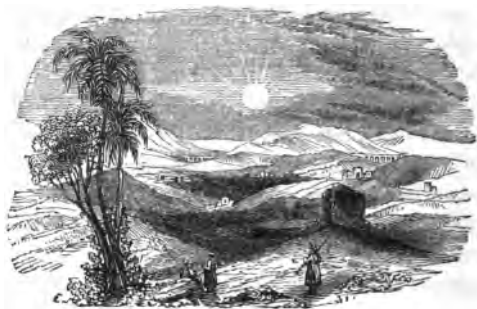
This holds true with regard to each individual Christian, however humble the station which he occupies—however limited the sphere assigned to him by the providence of God. Indeed, there is no situation in which it is possible for him to be placed, in which he has it not in his power to exemplify the very highest principles of Christianity; and the exemplification of such principles may be expected in any situation of life to be followed with good. Some Christians may attempt much, in the way of benefiting their fellow-men, by the wisdom of their counsels, by the weight of their influence, by the activity of their zeal, or by the riches of their liberality; and their efforts may be crowned with success. But these are talents which are not placed at the disposal of all, nor does the accomplishment of good depend altogether on their possession. We believe, on the contrary, that some of the noblest victories that have ever been gained over the prejudices of ungodly men have been achieved, not so much by high talents, or extraordinary endowments, as by the silent influence of a meek, humble, consistent, and Christian-like deportment. The wisest counsels may be rejected, the most enlightened zeal may be thwarted, the richest liberality may be abused. But let a man walk through the world as he ought to do, in simplicity, and in godly sincerity, adorning the doctrine of Jesus Christ his Saviour in all things, by a conversation that becometh the Gospel, and we venture to affirm that that man,

though endowed only with ordinary gifts, and placed in ordinary circumstances, will nevertheless be a blessing—a blessing to his family—a blessing to his neighbours—a blessing to the place in which he lives—a blessing to the church to which he belongs.

Nor is it necessary for the attainment of an end so important, that such a man should go out of his own sphere—the sphere that has been allotted to him by the sovereignty of God. The power of usefulness depends not so much on the circumstances in which he is placed, as on the spirit by which he is actuated. And the question for the consideration of every man is not, whether he be introduced to a sphere of usefulness that is very extensive, or confined to one that is exceedingly limited ;—whether it be one talent, or two talents, or ten talents that are entrusted to his charge ;—whether his influence be restricted to a family, or diffused over a community. But the question is,—Is he acting in the situation which he holds, whatever that situation may be, as a Christian ought to act, bringing forth the fruits of righteousness which are to the praise and glory of God ! That is the main point. So far as the principle of responsibility is concerned, none of us have to do with the circumstances of other men. Each man has to bear his own burden, and to answer for himself ; and perhaps that burden will be found heavy enough, even by the man whose duties are of the lightest kind, and whose sphere is of the most limited extent. And so far as the principle of positive faithfulness is concerned, there is no necessity for any change in our circumstances, for any addition to our talents, for any enlargement of our sphere. The chief

thing is to give ourselves in right earnest to the duties of our respective stations, whether we be masters or servants, whether we be parents or children, whether we be ministers or people. And whatever may be the immediate result of our exertions, though the seed which we may have sown with much anxiety and with many tears, should seem at least to the outward appearance, to be productive of no fruit, nay, though the church with which we are connected should be razed to its very foundations, and all its hallowed memorials should be permitted to pass into forgetfulness, yet there is another and a loftier temple, whose foundations never can be shaken, whose pillars shall never be removed. The pillars of that celestial temple are the faithful disciples of Christ of every name and in all places, who are now steadfast and immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as they know that their labour is not in vain in the Lord. These shall have an everlasting habitation in the sanctuary that is above, where there is nothing to hurt, or to offend, or to destroy ; and whatever be their experience in the present world, there they shall be acknowledged and recognised as the monuments of the divine faithfulness and power, having written upon them the new name which shall never be blotted out, and being in a condition for showing forth, in the presence of the highest intelligences of heaven, the glory of that great Redeemer who hath brought them out of darkness into marvellous light, and made them meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.

CHAPTER X.



THE CHURCH OF LAODICEA.

It does not appear that the Church of Laodicea was charged either with the sin of actual apostacy, nor with the guilt of open and acknowledged infidelity. Nay, it is not at all unlikely that she still professed her faith in the vital and fundamental doctrines which had been made known to her in the days of the apostle Paul, when that distinguished minister of Christ gave directions that his epistle to the Colossians should be read also to the Church of the Laodiceans ; in regard to whom, as well as for the Colossians, he likewise declares that he had a great conflict, that their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgment of the mystery

of God, and of the Father, and of Christ. But though she might still hold fast the form of sound words as conveyed to her in the preaching of the most distinguished of Christ's apostles, keeping clear of any glaring heresy, and retaining all the advantages of an orthodox creed, it is evident notwithstanding, that her religious profession was made in the spirit either of formality or hypocrisy. She had no great liking for the doctrines which habit had rendered familiar to her, and in which she professed to believe. For, instead of being sensitively alive to their value, or making any sacrifices for their preservation, or putting forth any effort for their maintenance and diffusion, she had declined into that state of cold, listless indifference which led her to give herself no trouble or concern about the matter. Nay, she was not only regarding with indifference what ought to have been viewed by her as a matter of paramount importance, and thereby bringing down upon herself the guilt of neglecting the great salvation ; but she was placing the religion she professed in a false position, raising as it were a standard for the truth which was emblazoned with the grossest corruption, exposing to opposition and contempt the very doctrines which it was her duty to vindicate, to magnify, and promote, and thereby giving great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme. And it is deserving of notice that this state of lifelessness and of lukewarmness was peculiarly offensive in the eye of the Divine Redeemer, more offensive apparently than if she had assumed the aspect of open infidelity, so offensive indeed that he actually threatened that he would spue her out of his mouth.

But we find that the Church of Laodicea was not only distinguished for her lukewarmness ; she was also remarkable for her pride. At the very time she was lying under the sentence of the Saviour's condemnation, and was altogether loathsome in his sight, she was entertaining a high opinion of her spiritual condition, and was actually saying of herself :—" I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing." There is something striking and instructive in this fact. It is what at first sight we are scarcely prepared to expect. For when we think that Laodicea, of all the churches of Asia, was the most obnoxious and reprehensible, it might at least have been supposed that in her case there would have been no palpable traces of high-mindedness—no proud and presumptuous boasting. Nevertheless the reverse was the actual fact ; and however anomalous it may appear, the church which of all others was the most corrupt, was at the same time the most proud.

And such, we believe, is invariably the case both with individuals and with communities. The fact of their being found in that state of mind in which they are disposed to say of themselves, " I am rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing," affords of itself the most substantial of all evidences, that there is something radically and essentially wrong—that they have no right perception either of their own spiritual condition, or of the riches of the Saviour's grace—that they are still in the gall of bitterness, and in the bondage of iniquity, having the eyes of their understandings darkened, and being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them. Indeed, wherever there is pride

there must be ignorance ; and the one is most likely to be proportioned to the other. There is no pride in heaven, or amongst the high and holy intelligences that surround the throne of the living and the everlasting God. Theirs is the attitude of humility—humility, indeed, of a character so profound that they cover up their faces with their wings ; and with prostrate forms, and uncovered heads, their crowns being cast at their feet, they ascribe all the wisdom, and the glory, and the honour, and the power unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and to the Lamb for ever. But then these are beings of high and varied accomplishments, who since the days of their creation have been exercising and expanding their vast capacities in the immediate presence of Almighty God, and in a world of surpassing glory, where there is none of the darkness that beclouds our mortal faculties, and where all is light, and purity, and peace. And there is an approximation to the same spirit on the part of every experienced and established Christian on earth. The further such a man advances on the path of holiness, and the nearer he approaches to the borders of heaven, the stronger will be his abhorrence of every proud imagination that exalteth itself against God, and the closer his fellowship with that spirit of profound humility that so distinguishes the loftiest of all the worshippers that are before the throne above. And hence the man who is possessed of the highest Christian attainments, or whose knowledge and experience have been carried out to the widest range, will be at the same time the most sensible of his own deficiencies, and the most thoroughly invested with the ornament of a meek and humble spirit.

It was far otherwise with Laodicea. She was remaining amid the miseries of her natural condition, estranged from the blessings of the great salvation, and altogether poor, and wretched, and miserable, and blind, and naked, and destitute, and ready to perish. In fact, she was in the very condition which was fitted to sink her into the depths of the lowest humiliation, and to cover her with shame and confusion of face. Yet her ignorance was so profound, that she was perfectly satisfied with her own condition, and instead of betaking herself to the righteousness of Christ, that she might be complete in him in whom dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily, she had the arrogance to glory in her own filthy rags, as if with these she was rich, and increased in goods, and had need of nothing else.

With these facts before us, it is difficult to conceive of any circumstances in which it is possible for a church to be placed, which can be more deplorable than were those of the Church of Laodicea. She was not only in a state of total destitution, but she was ignorant of her real condition, and exceedingly proud, while her pride was the sign and the measure both of her corruption and her misery, and withal she was so careless and lukewarm, that Christ actually threatened to spue her out of his mouth. Nevertheless, there is this remarkable peculiarity in the invitations and promises held out to her, that they seem to be characterized, if possible, by a greater richness, and urgency, and magnificence than those which were addressed to any of the other churches. The bowels of the Divine Redeemer appear to have been yearning over her with a feeling of ineffable tenderness and compassion,

and a feeling which seems to have been awakened into greater power and intensity, by reason of the depths of wretchedness and corruption into which she was sunk. The very richest treasures of his grace are displayed before her with all their attractions, and with all their preciousness. There is gold tried in the fire, free from the dross of all corruption, and wrought into a state of the highest refinement, even the unsearchable riches of Christ, the treasure which waxeth not old, the enduring substance, the heritage that is incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away. There is white raiment, even the righteousness which Christ himself has wrought out, and which is free from every spot of defilement, and which is sufficient to cover up and to cancel the transgressions even of the chief of sinners, and to present them faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy. And there is eye-salve, even the unction of his own Holy Spirit, that, the eyes of their understanding being enlightened, they may know what is the hope of their calling, and what the riches of the glory of the inheritance in the saints, and what the exceeding greatness of his power to them-ward that believe, and what the measure of that love of Christ which passeth understanding, and which filleth them with all the fulness of God. And not only are these inestimable blessings placed within their reach, and offered to their acceptance, so that they are at perfect liberty to appropriate them to themselves, if they will, but they are pressed upon them with the greatest urgency and that by the Divine Redeemer himself. For he does not stand at a great distance away from them, look-

ing upon them with the same spirit of lukewarmness that they were entertaining towards him, and quietly waiting till they should cast down the weapons of their rebellion, and return of their own accord unto him from whom they had so grievously revolted. He places himself at the door of their hearts, the very hearts, which though open at all times for the admission of every other guest, have hitherto been barred against him, as with bolts of triple iron : and there he stands and knocks, as with the urgency of a petitioner begging for admission—knocks loudly—knocks vehemently—knocks with his whole soul, that he may enter in, and abolish their cherished idols, and cleanse them from their foulest abominations, and make them glad with the joys of his great salvation. And even though there should be no general movement—though the church in her corporate capacity should remain dead and lukewarm as before, nevertheless, if there was but one isolated individual out of the whole multitude of those dead souls, who would hear his voice, and open the door, still for his sake alone he was willing to wait, and to enter in, though he should be slighted, and cast out, and rejected by all the rest. And not only so, but the promise reserved for the man who should thus open, and through his strength be enabled to overcome, is, perhaps, the richest and most magnificent that is addressed to any of the churches, or contained in any part of the sacred volume—a promise indeed so very remarkable, that we believe no man will ever be able to understand it, till he passes within the veil, and opens his eyes upon the stupendous and unimaginable glories of heaven. “For to him that overcometh,” saith the great

Redeemer, "will I grant to sit with me on my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father on his throne."

Here then we have the church, for whose spiritual well-being the apostle Paul had a great conflict, and which seems at one time to have been blest with the enjoyment of high privileges. But now this was the only church in which the Divine Redeemer could discover nothing to commend. And why? She had sunk into a state of worldliness and lukewarmness, having no fervent zeal either for the maintenance or the promotion of the great principles, in which she professed to believe, while at the same time, she was as completely satisfied with her own condition, as if she had attained to the character of unimpeachable perfection. For there is this peculiarity in regard to her, that, while of all the churches of Asia she was the most wretched, and the most loathsome, she was at the same time the proudest, the least sensible of her miseries, the most arrogant in her pretensions. It had been well for her if she had had somewhat less of the spirit of self-sufficiency which accords but too well with the maxims of a world that lieth in wickedness, and somewhat more of the fervent and inextinguishable zeal which passes beyond all ordinary bounds, and wears the aspect of extravagance only when tested by a different standard than is furnished by the purity and the boundlessness of the love of Christ which kindles it. But her lukewarmness was equalled only by her pride, and both together were so offensive in the sight of the great Redeemer, that he threatened to spue her out of his

mouth. And because she still refused to avail herself of the rich promises, and the gracious invitations that were set before her, the awful threatening was at last carried into effect.

For Laodicea is now in ruins, her ancient grandeur utterly annihilated, and all her splendid edifices levelled with the dust, and the ruin, moreover, has been accomplished in a remarkable manner. For as stated by a distinguished traveller :—"Laodicea is now utterly desolated, and without any inhabitants, except wolves, and jackalls, and foxes, but the ruins show sufficiently what it has been formerly ; the three theatres and the circus adding much to the stateliness of it, and arguing its greatness. One of the theatres is very large, and might contain twenty or thirty thousand men." Then he adds what is specially deserving of attention :—"The country round about abounded in hot springs, and hence it was subject to frequent earthquakes, the nitrous vapour compressed in the cavities, and sublimed by heat or fermentation, bursting its prison with loud explosions." —(*Dr. Smith.*)

This, it appears, was the engine of divine vengeance employed for the overthrow of the city, and by which the finest works of art have been buried at a considerable depth under the soil. And when, along with the eruptions of these tepid springs, there are the evident traces of volcanic agency, so that the same traveller remarks, "that the surface of the country about Laodicea has been formed from its own bowels," it certainly imparts an awful meaning, and a tremendous power to the words of

the Divine Redeemer :—"Because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth."

Therefore the great lesson which we learn from the fate of the Church of Laodicea, is the danger of lukewarmness, in regard to matters of religion—in regard to the well-being of the Church of Christ—in regard to the interests of our own souls. And lukewarm we cannot fail to be, and as loathsome as we are lukewarm, so long as Christ is excluded from our hearts. When he obtains admission there, and meets with a cordial entertainment, the fire will begin to burn, and the love will never wax cold, and every faculty will be enlisted in his service, and we shall account it our meat and our drink to do his pleasure, and we shall rejoice to be accounted worthy to suffer in his cause, and all will be life, and activity, and zeal. But the man who can crucify the Son of God afresh, and shut him out from every chamber of the inner man, and give no heed to the earnest pleadings of his agonizing Spirit, can have no understanding of what zeal is, and no sympathy with the people that are animated with its fervent and its self-denying power. He has a heart not of flesh, but of stone ; and so long as that heart is within him, need we wonder that he is insensible to the pleadings of the Saviour's voice—that he makes no response to the loud knocking of his hands.

Reader ! Is it so with you ? Has not the Divine Redeemer been knocking at the door of your heart, and agonising for admission ? Has he not been knocking

with intensest earnestness, seeing that your attention was pre-occupied with other guests, while you were coldly denying to him the entrance that he wished? Has he not been knocking with the most patient endurance, bearing long with you amid all the provocations of your rebellion, still lingering at the door of the heart, notwithstanding of all your hard speeches, your ungenerous treatment, and your desperate ungodliness, watching still for a seasonable opportunity to come in, and though frequently compelled to retire as it were to a great distance, and to mourn over you, yet coming back to you, and making his voice to be heard, amid the stillness of the solemn night, or amid the desolations of the deepest affliction when the heart itself has been brought low? Has he not been knocking with loud and vehement impetuosity, making the keepers of that dark prison-house to tremble in their refuges of lies, and well nigh constraining you to surrender as in the day of his mighty power? Has such been the merciful dealing of the great Redeemer who has been knocking so long and so loudly, at the door of your hearts, and have you resisted all his solicitations, and instead of fleeing as the prisoner of hope to the strong-hold, have you been enclosing yourself in refuges which you feel in your very heart to be refuges of lies? And is it there you have brought yourself into a state of tranquillity and repose—amid such refuges you hope to elude the keen searching of his omniscient eye—beneath the shelter of such delusions you purpose to abide the dread reckoning of the Judgment Day! Wretched man! Peace there

may be in thy spirit for the present, but it is resting on a false foundation, and compassed about with strong delusions—delusions which the light of eternity will dispel for ever, and if you still refuse to renounce them, they must ultimately terminate in your perdition.

The Saviour is still standing at the door, waiting to help you amid your miseries, to sustain the weight of your heaviest burdens, to comfort you with the sweetest of his consolations ; and he is such a Saviour as you need—such a Saviour as you cannot do without. You have heard his invitations before, and peradventure you have given to them a cold reception. Oh listen to his invitations to-day, and to-day harden not your heart as in the day of provocation. He hath waited long, and he hath borne much : oh suffer him not to wait any longer, lest he turn his mercies into judgments, and say of you in language that may strike a note of alarm into the deafest ear and the hardest heart :—Because I have called, and ye refused, I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded, but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof, I also will laugh at your calamity, I will mock when your fear cometh, when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind.—Then shall ye call upon me, but I will not answer, ye shall seek me early, but ye shall not find me.

Rather be it your part in this the day of your merciful visitation, and while the offers of the gospel are urged on your acceptance, to cast down the weapons of your rebellion, and to enter with the Divine Redeemer into a

covenant that shall never be forgotten ; and the result will be as different as it is delightful. Though, in yourselves altogether poor, and wretched, and blind, and miserable, and destitute, and ready to perish, Christ will be made unto you both wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and complete redemption. All things will be yours, whether life, or death, or angels, or principalities, or powers, or things present, or things to come ; and the very blessings which rightfully appertain to the great Mediator he will actually condescend to share with you. For these are his own words :—" Behold, I stand at the door and knock ; if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me ; and to him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me on my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father on his throne."

Thus it is with every sinner that believes the gospel. He enters into covenant with Christ, and Christ enters into covenant with him. And what follows ? Why the relative position of the parties is completely changed. Christ on the one hand becomes his, and he on the other hand becomes Christ's. And how remarkable the exchange, and how momentous in its results ! All that properly belongs to the sinner—his soul, his body, his spirit, his infirmities, his anxieties, and all things else that are difficult to be borne, are taken as it were out of his own hands. They are no longer his own. He need oppress himself with the weight or the charge of them no more. For they are laid upon Christ's shoulders. The entire

charge of them is devolved upon him. Even his very sins are reckoned to his account ; and it rests with Christ, and not with himself, to blot them out as a thick cloud from the face of the heavens, or to cast them into the depths of the sea, that so they may rise up against him in judgment no more for ever. And not only so, but all that properly belongs to Christ in the character of the great Mediator—the fruits of his obedience, the purchase of his blood, the virtue of his merits—merits that are infinite—merits that are inexhaustible are laid upon the shoulders of the sinner, and reckoned to his account ; and it rests with himself to plead them as often as he will, to take all the benefit of them which his most urgent necessities can require, and withal to clothe himself with them as with a garment, that so he may stand perfect and complete in the very presence and before the dread majesty of God himself. What a marvellous alteration of circumstances ! The sinner gives himself to Christ, and however vile, however worthless he may be, Christ generously accepts of the offer. He takes his sins, and nails them to his cross. He relieves him of his burdens, and bears them on his own body. He gathers together his imperfections, and plunges them in his blood. He searches out the bitterest of his sorrows, and makes them sweet to his taste by the balm of his most precious consolations. Nor is there any thing that belongs to him which he refuses to watch over and to keep—his soul ! he preserves it as the apple of his eye—the hairs upon his head ! not one of them can fall to the ground without his notice—his feet ! he keeps them from falling,

and establishes them in all their goings—his tears! he treasures them up in his own bottle—his prayers! he puts them into his own censer, and embalms them with the incense of his own righteousness, and presents them as his own before the throne of his Father. Nay, what the dearest of his earthly friends may be constrained to relinquish, he never leaves nor forsakes. Even when the soul hath gone to its everlasting home, and hath left the mortal tabernacle behind, that very tabernacle in its state of dishonour, and weakness, and corruption, is still under the charge of the great Redeemer, and is precious in his sight. Not a particle of its dust can be lost, for it is the property of Christ which he hath purchased with his blood; and when the time appointed in his own purposes shall arrive, it also shall be redeemed from destruction, and raised in glory, and everlastingly connected with the glorified soul in a world where there is neither the bitterness of death, nor the noisomeness of the grave, and where the pangs of parting, and the chastisements of sin are succeeded by a fulness of joy, and by pleasures which are at God's right hand for ever.

How comfortable to have all our interests, both temporal and eternal, placed at the disposal, and under the keeping of a Saviour, who, while invested with the prerogatives of the divinity, and touched with the feeling of our very infirmities, is also pledged by covenant engagement to keep with the utmost care whatsoever is committed to his charge against the great and solemn day of the Lord! What a blessed privilege to be permitted, out of the depths of the lowest distress, in the moment of the

greatest helplessness, or when oppressed with the consciousness of our own guilt, to cast all our cares upon him in the confidence that he careth for us, to leave every thing to be done by him, because we are persuaded we can do nothing for ourselves, and are assured that every thing done by him will be done in the way that is best ; and instead of involving ourselves in distracting perplexities, and labouring after a righteousness of our own, and spending our strength for nought, to give up all without reserve, and with our whole souls, into his hands, that he may do for us exceeding abundantly above all that we are able either to ask or think ; and that clothing us with his own perfect righteousness, and covering us in the hollow of his hand, he may conduct us by his mighty power through faith unto salvation, and at last, present us faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy.

This is the way, and the only way, in which we can ever attain to the blessings of the great salvation ; and it is a way that is open unto all—open without money and without price—open even to the chief of sinners. But unless we come in that way, being willing to forego all claims of our own, to receive every blessing out of Christ's hand, and to give unto him the full and undivided glory of our salvation, we never can be accepted, or justified, or saved. We must appear in that case clothed in our own righteousness, which is described as being nothing better in the sight of God than filthy rags ; and having no share in the white raiment which Christ hath purchased with his blood, and which constitutes the

righteousness of all his saints, we can neither stand with acceptance before the bar of judgment, nor take our places among the nations of the redeemed, who, having washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb, are of one mind, not in appropriating unto themselves, but in ascribing unto Him who hath loved them and given himself for them, all the wisdom, and the glory, and the honour, and the thanksgiving, and the victory, for ever and ever. Amen.

CHAPTER XI.

CONCLUDING REMARKS.

WHETHER we revert to the past history, or contemplate the present condition of the Seven Churches of Asia, we can scarcely fail to be impressed with a feeling of deep solemnity and awe. In every particular of the messages originally addressed to them, in every fact supported by the testimony of competent historians, in every calamity that has been suffered to befall them, in every description of the desolation and the ruins that now mark the scenes of their pristine glory, and their holy solemnities, we gather materials not only interesting and important in themselves, but furnishing the most conclusive evidence of the faithfulness of Almighty God, in vindicating the principles of his own government, carrying his recorded threatenings into actual accomplishment, and visiting the abuse of distinguished privileges with the infliction of the most awful judgments.

Men, indeed, may speculate on the mercy of God as what they are disposed to regard as the darling attribute of his character, and they may try to modify the other perfections of his nature, till they have brought them down to the level of their own taste, or adapted them to the standard of their own corruptions, and thereby divested them of the dignity and the glory that properly belong to them. But in the declension and the ruin of

these ancient and illustrious churches we are presented with plain and palpable facts—facts which the light of prophecy and the revelations of God's word invest with a character of the deepest meaning, and the most impressive solemnity. The man that runneth may read the lessons which they teach, if he will. They lift up their voices against all the extravagant refinements of a sentimental theology : they proclaim that God is glorious in holiness as well as glorious in power—that he is equally faithful in the fulfilment of his threatenings as in the accomplishment of his promises—that he is a just God as well as a Saviour—and that while, with regard to all who betake themselves to the refuge set before them in the gospel, he is the Lord God merciful and gracious, long-suffering and abundant in goodness and in truth, keeping mercy for thousands, and forgiving iniquity, and transgression, and sin ; it is no less true, with regard to all who trample on his richest mercies, and abuse the privileges with which they are surrounded, and turn his grace into licentiousness, that he is also a jealous God, who cannot give his glory unto another, and who will by no means clear the guilty.

This was strikingly exemplified in the case of the Seven Churches of Asia, and exemplified on this side of the grave. They, indeed, in common with all communities, were so constituted as to retain their existence in a corporate capacity in the present world only ; and therefore whatever treatment they required in the way of correction, of discipline, or of punishment, instead of being deferred to the judgment of the last day, or left to the retributions of eternity, was provided and applied

during the course of the present life. For the solemnities of the final judgment are not prepared, either for the condemnation, or the reward of bodies of men—men associated together, and holding the character of communities. Neither nations nor churches are appointed to appear before the dread tribunal in their corporate capacity, nor are any of the adventitious distinctions, by which they are now separated from other classes of mankind, to be hereafter kept up or recognised. And therefore the fact of any man's being connected with a particular church, how scriptural soever may be her standards, or belonging to a peculiar people, how distinguished soever may be their privileges, will be, of itself, and irrespective of personal character, of no avail at the judgment of the last day. But each individual, whether holding the character of a genuine believer, or a mere formal professor, or an open worker of iniquity, will be singled out from the other beings with whom he stood associated in the present life, and cited to answer personally for himself, and called to a solemn account for all the deeds that have been done by him in the body, whether they have been good, or whether they have been evil. And, because of the reckoning which shall be demanded from each, no evil however limited remaining undressed, and no sin of whatsoever character being permitted to pass with impunity, justice will of course be rendered unto all.

It is different with communities. As such they are recognised, and dealt with in the present world only, and the present world is the place appointed for their correction, and their punishment. Hence it frequently

happens, that the interests of men in the present life are materially affected, not exclusively by the position which they hold individually in the sight of God, but by the general character of the churches, the nations, or the communities to which they belong, and of which they form a constituent part; and hence also the language of Solomon:—"There be just men, unto whom it happeneth according to the work of the wicked; again, there be wicked men, to whom it happeneth according to the work of the righteous.—All things come alike to all: there is one event to the righteous, and to the wicked; to the good, and to the clean, and to the unclean; to him that sacrificeth, and to him that sacrificeth not: as is the good, so is the sinner; and he that sweareth, as he that feareth an oath."

Bearing, then, these principles in remembrance, and applying them to the Seven Churches of Asia, what do we find? Never, surely, were churches placed in a more commanding position, or possessed of higher advantages. Whether we consider the constitution of their government, their proximity to the light and purity of apostolic times, or the super-eminent attainments of the ministers who were set over them in the Lord, we might almost have been led to regard them, if such could be the case with any Christian communities on earth, as possessing claims to the character of infallibility, while susceptible of an indefinite extension, and incapable of being ever destroyed. Yet, how different is the conclusion to which we are led, when we trace the progress of events, or turn our thoughts to the actual details of their history. Even the churches which Paul had

planted, and Apollos watered, and to which Christ himself had given the increase, were yet liable to the grossest abuses, and became, in the course of a brief period of time, so utterly corrupt, that the Redeemer, who walketh in the midst of the golden candlesticks, and who holdeth the stars in his right hand, not only threatened to come unto them quickly, for the purpose of fighting against them, or breaking them in pieces as a potter's vessel, but for the most part they have actually fallen under the vengeance of his righteous judgments, and are now overspread with the ruins and the desolations of many generations.

Has such been the doom of the Churches of Asia—churches whose form of government was drawn up by inspired apostles, and whose ancient annals are embellished with the life and achievements of the most eminent saints, the most faithful ministers, and the most heroic martyrs; and to what shall we look for the maintenance or stability of our own, or of any other church on earth? Not altogether or exclusively to the orthodoxy of her creed, to the constitution of her government, to the dust of her martyrs, to the glory of her bye-gone reformati^ons, to the imperishable records of her ancient history. These, indeed, may be very precious, constituting the richest of our treasures, and deserving to be held in everlasting remembrance. But after all, there is no form of government, however perfect; no doctrinal standards, however strictly accordant with the principles of the Bible; no legacy transmitted from our fathers, how precious soever the privileges it entails; no ancient records, how hallowed

soever the associations which they awaken, which afford in themselves any ground for boasting, or any certain guarantee for the preservation of our religious advantages. These may become matters of mere form, little better than a dead letter, exercising no practical influence on our hearts, and regarded more in the spirit of that vain-glorious boasting, which is an utter abomination in the sight of Almighty God, than as a stimulus to diligence and fidelity, in the cultivation of the graces of the Divine Spirit, and in the improvement, to the glory of God, and the salvation of our own souls, of all our high and inestimable privileges. The main thing, for the well-being and security of any church, is to have its congregations made up of the living members of Christ's body—men of faith—men of godliness—men of prayer—men who embody the orthodoxy of her creed in their daily habits, and carry into all the forms of her constitution the vital principles of the Christian life. Without these, no degree of zeal, no professions of attachment to Christ's cause, and no outward reformatations are likely to be followed with any permanent or beneficial results. But wherever there are the true members of Christ's body, there also will be their living Head; and that living Head will be the glory, the safeguard, and the defence of the church to which they belong.

We trust that it shall not be otherwise with the church with which we profess to be connected—the ancient and the venerated Church of Scotland. That Church in times past has been greatly honoured by God, in being set forth for the vindication of certain great and fundamental principles of the Divine Word—principles which are not

only of vital moment to her own well-being, but which, being in their nature eternal, and of everlasting obligation, are of importance also to other nations, and to other churches, throughout the world, and throughout all generations. She has had her share in the struggles and triumphs of the reformation. She has contended for the purity and integrity of the standards of eternal truth. She has fought for the education of her children in the entire and un mutilated oracles of the living God. She has lifted up her testimony against popery, and infidelity, and false doctrine, and heresy. And her church-yards and her everlasting hills have been made immortal by the dust of her noble and her venerated martyrs.

Once more she has been called into the field of conflict ; and the principle for which she is now struggling, though one of little moment, and easily adjusted, when viewed in the light of worldly expediency, is as comprehensive and important, when considered in the light of scripture, as any of the great principles for which she has been contending in times past. She has already demonstrated that the principle of an establishment is accordant with the standards of eternal truth, and as necessary for the wide diffusion of the gospel through all the borders of the church, as for the stability and glory of the throne in the high places of the land. But the question which is now at issue, and which remains to be decided, when cleared from all adventitious circumstances, and viewed in its essential elements, is simply this :—Is it possible that a church can be established by law, and allowed at the same time to retain her position and her jurisdiction as a Church of Christ ! No doubt, there are a vast multitude

of other circumstances, and a great variety of secondary and subordinate interests interwoven with this question, and interposing the most formidable obstacles to its right and scriptural adjustment. But this is the main point :— Can a church be invested with all the advantages of an establishment, and yet be permitted to give herself to the free and unfettered exercise of all the rights and prerogatives which belong to her as a Church of Christ ? If it be demonstrated that this cannot be accomplished, without injury to herself, and with safety to the commonwealth, it is impossible to resist the conviction, that she deserves to be extinguished : for Christ's crown is then blotted from her banners.

But if it be admitted that it is lawful or scriptural for a church to be established at all, it follows as a matter of course, that her spiritual independence may be preserved, and ought, without any compromise, and at all hazards to be maintained. That indeed is a principle of the Bible which involves her faithfulness to her divine Head ; and there is no principle of the Bible, though encompassed with the hugest difficulties, and opposed by the gates of hell itself, which the faith and resolution of any Christian church may not be able to vindicate and uphold. It was by the efforts of a few humble fishermen that Christ's cause in primitive times was carried in triumph over the world ; and it was one or two individuals that were the main instruments in effecting the reformation of the sixteenth century. And the same spirit which was displayed by these men, if manifested again, may be followed with similar results.

So far therefore there is ground for hope ; and were

there any thing like unanimity in the Church herself; her ministers, her office-bearers, and her members, with one heart and with one soul, entering into the same covenant, ranging themselves under the same standard, and pleading for the vindication of the same great principle; there is little reason to doubt, that the judgment of the Church of Scotland would speedily be brought forth unto victory.

This, however, is a result which it is scarcely warrantable in present circumstances to anticipate. The Church is not only surrounded with enemies from without: there are also divisions and disorders from within; while the principle itself, for which she is contending, is of a character so spiritual, and so closely connected with the glory of that great Redeemer, who has ever been despised and rejected of men, that it is not likely to meet readily with the countenance or support of any man, or of any class of men, guided more by the devices of worldly policy, than by the principles of the word of God.

These, and other considerations in the present aspect of affairs make it more than probable, that the struggle for this great principle is yet far from being brought to its final termination. Nay, there are various principles regulating the procedure of God's providence with the church, which lead us to expect that she will yet be made to pass through deeper waters than have hitherto been permitted to overwhelm her, for the purpose of chastising her, and that in the season of her revival, for her bye-past sins; for the purpose also of drawing the attention of princes, of senators, and of all classes of men to well-grounded and scriptural conceptions of the

constitution of a Christian church ; and for the purpose, moreover, of purging out from the church herself, both by the exercise of a salutary discipline, and by the stern siftings of God's providence, whatsoever would interfere with the integrity of Christ's kingdom, and with the glory of his perfect righteousness.

On these grounds there is an urgent call for the profoundest humiliation, the closest searchings of heart, and the most importunate prayer, in the case of every family apart, and every individual apart, that, while mourning over the short-comings and the defections of which the church has been guilty, we may attain also to a clear discernment of the principles of the divine word, and may be enabled to maintain them in such a spirit, as God himself will bless for the furtherance of his own glory, and for the well-being and the unity of the Church he has established in our land.

This, doubtless, is the duty to which we are called. Let us give ourselves faithfully to its performance ; and God peradventure will look upon us in mercy, and arise for our deliverance. And though, for wise and important ends, the deliverance may be deferred for a season—though darker clouds should yet gather than have ever blackened the horizon, and rougher storms should yet rise than have ever swept over the land—though the banners of our venerated Church, soiled with the dust of ages, and sorely torn, by reason of her struggles for the liberties of her people, should again be unfurled to the breeze, and borne into the battle field, emblazoned with the ancient and imperishable legend, “For Christ's kingdom and for Christ's crown ;” still do we entertain

the hope and the expectation that the Church of Scotland, strong in the affections of her people, and faithful in her allegiance to her ever living Head, will not only retain her position and her privileges as the established Church of our beloved land, but will stand forth, when the day of trial is past, more prominently than before—a bulwark of impregnable strength—a monument of imperishable glory—a rock unmoved and immovable amid the fierce billows that are lashing against her—a bush blazing with living fire, which is at once her glory and her defence, because it has the virtue to refine and to purify, without the potency to burn up or to destroy.

THE END.

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